The Dissertation Committee for Jeffrey Lamar Howard certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

Heretical Reading: Freedom as Question and Process in Postmodern American Novel and Technological Pedagogy

Committee:

Tony Hilfer, Supervisor

Wayne Lesser

Martin Kevorkian

Diane Davis

L. Michael White

Heretical Reading: Freedom as Question and Process in Postmodern American Novel and Technological Pedagogy

by

Jeffrey Lamar Howard, B.A., M.A.

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2007

Dedication

To my parents: Lamar and Melissa Howard

Heretical Reading: Freedom as Question and Process in Postmodern American Novel and Technological Pedagogy

Publication No._____

Jeffrey Lamar Howard, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2007

Supervisor: Tony Hilfer

Abstract

My dissertation describes a method of reading with literary, disciplinary, and pedagogical implications. In literary terms, heretical reading refers to the way that the postmodern novelists Thomas Pynchon, Vladimir Nabokov, and Philip K. Dick read and appropriate Gnosticism in order to construct narratives about the struggle to regain freedom in novels such as Gravity's Rainbow, Invitation to a Beheading, and VALIS. On a disciplinary level, heretical reading is an interpretative method I exert to foreground possibilities of freedom within postmodern fiction that intrude into the background of the poststructuralist definition of the world but ultimately transcend it. These four forms of freedom are freedom as presence and transcendence, as liberating knowledge, as a spirituality constituting self-awareness, and as choice conceived navigationally rather than hierarchically. Postmodern authors imply these possibilities consciously and

metafictionally, but heretical reading is also my way of foregrounding and intensifying them. I put this theoretical program into practice through the pedagogical use of hypertext and interactive fiction. Students compose interpretative essays that make a "heretical" interpretative choice by choosing a path through the text that has been closed off by a previous group of interpreters. This path consists of the linkages between "sparks"—passages that stand out with particular imaginative and intuitive significance against a background of indeterminacy. Students know these sparks as non-totalizing intimations of presence that their own non-totalizing selves respond to in order to offer a sense of "interior direction" required to navigate through the composition of an essay. I then describe a final pedagogical extension of heretical reading focused around a type of computer game called interactive fiction. Heretical reading seeks to transform printed novels into interactive fictions in order to encourage freedom in the form of interaction, allowing classroom discussion to change the ways the text is imagined and experienced. The convictions underlying heretical reading function within the classroom as a set of rules, but these rules are designed to open up, not to constrain; to energetically orient, not to govern; to yield satisfactions at the expressive level, not to conclude.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Heretical reading is an interpretative strategy that weaves a rich and elaborate conversation about freedom out of three seemingly disparate topics: postmodern fiction, the second-century Christian sect called Gnosticism, and pedagogical applications of technology. Chapters one and two analyze the function of Gnosticism in the genesis and execution of postmodern fictions by Thomas Pynchon, Vladimir Nabokov, and Philip K. Dick. These three authors consciously read and appropriate Gnosticism, a second-century religious movement defined by the orthodox Christian church as a heresy, to construct and develop their novels. Ancient Gnosticism was an intricate religious system whose details are further complicated by the relative scarcity of currently available source materials, a constant tendency of its original followers to imaginatively expand and revise their own beliefs, and fierce polemical tendencies among present-day explicators. For centuries, the primary surviving evidence of Gnosticism came from the heresiologists, champions of the emerging Christian "orthodoxy." They condemned the Gnostics for arrogantly claiming access to secret insights and systems that questioned the foundations of Christianity, at least as they understood it. At the same time, they bristled at the claims of some Gnostics to be spiritually superior Christians.

Pynchon, Dick, and Nabokov embrace the Gnostic "heresy" rather than condemning it because of their countercultural allegiance to the critique of prevailing "orthodoxies" and their powerful commitment to freedom. Instead of taking "heresy" in

a normative way, they celebrate it as an alternative both to the secularized disenchantment of postmodernity and orthodox, institutionalized Christianity still practiced by many Americans. Pynchon expresses his positive understanding of heresy when he thanks Salman Rushdie in an open letter for reminding writers of "our duty as heretics" to resist "power" and "unreason" (29). Dick also specifically declares his admiration for the Gnostics in the lecture "How to Build a Universe That Doesn't Fall Apart Two Days Later," where he acknowledges his artistic use of Gnostic ideas despite their persecution by orthodox Christianity (264).

These authors acquired their historical information about Gnosticism from an array of different sources mediated through various philosophies and scholarly approaches. Scholarship of Gnosticism changed greatly between the 1930's and 1980's, when Pynchon, Nabokov, and Dick wrote their most heavily Gnostic-influenced novels. Most early scholarship of Gnosticism drew upon the heresiologists and a few fragmentary extant Gnostic texts, as well as the writings of analogous religious sects such as the Manichaeans and the Mandaeans. These texts remained the standard sources for scholarship of Gnosticism until the discovery in 1945 of the Nag Hammadi codices in an Egyptian village. Hans Jonas's 1958 The Gnostic Religion drew primarily on sources discovered before Nag Hammadi, though a second 1962 edition of the book incorporated some early scholarship of the Nag Hammadi texts. While most scholarship of Gnosticism before Nag Hammadi accepted the heresiolologists' argument that Gnosticism was a Christian heresy, Jonas acknowledged this position without acceding to it fully (xvi). He constructed an elaborate outline of Gnosticism as a syncretic religious

system possessing its own "autonomous essence" with strong analogies to modern existentialism (33). Jonas expressed a high degree of intellectual and aesthetic fascination with Gnosticism, suggesting that if Gnosticism had become the dominant source of religious art it would have produced works of wild imagination and "intense human appeal" (xii). Pynchon and Dick both used Jonas' work extensively, but they also wrote during a wave of revisionary scholarship of Gnosticism brought about by the study of the Nag Hammadi texts. Elaine Pagels' The Gnostic Gospels, which describes Gnosticism as an alternative to orthodox Christianity with positive religious and political implications, exemplifies this revisionary movement. This scholarship radically altered historical understandings of Gnosticism, leading some scholars to question whether it was actually a heresy and even whether there was a separate, coherent historical movement that could be accurately called "Gnosticism."

According to Jonas, the Gnostics sought to explain the problem of evil by asserting that the world was created by a malevolent deity, called the Demiurge (Greek: "artisan" or "creator"), who claimed to be the true God but was not. The true, "alien" God existed apart from the material world in a realm of complete cosmic "fullness" or *pleroma*. In the Gnostic cosmology, hope comes from fragments of the true God, called *pneuma* (Greek: "spirit"), which reside in the innermost reaches of human beings. The Gnostics acquired their name because they believed that salvation comes from *gnosis* (Greek: "knowledge") of the presence of this *pneuma* and its oneness with the true God. In the meantime, however, the material world is ruled by servants of the Demiurge, called *archons* (Greek: "rulers"), who persecute the Gnostics and attempt to thwart their

oneness with the true God (Jonas 31-47, 179-82). Working after the discovery of the Nag Hammadi texts, Pagels reflects an emerging consensus by defining *gnosis* as "self-knowledge as knowledge of God," which she explains as a reliance on individual imagination analogous to artistic creativity and psychoanalytic self-exploration (119-41). Gnostic approaches to Christianity entailed a symbolic rather than a literal interpretation of Christ's suffering and resurrection, as well as a valorization of feminine representations of spirituality (3-28, 70-102, 48-70). Pagels also argues that Gnostic mythology had distinctly political implications relating to authority and power in the second century, such as the right to define the "true" church and the contestation of official—especially masculine—ecclesiastical hierarchies (28-48, 102-19).

Pynchon, Nabokov, and Dick themselves actively read and appropriate the Gnostic tradition as a narrative of liberation, a set of thematic concerns with transcendence, knowledge, and selfhood, as well as a challenge to enact these themes through critique and resistance. Chapters one and two of this dissertation analyze the author's appropriations of Gnosticism in depth, but a brief summary of specific key references within the primary texts can demonstrate the authors' conscious historical awareness of Gnostic texts and related issues. In Pynchon's novel Gravity's Rainbow, a "Counterforce" of Gnostic rebels attempts to subvert the evils of an archontic, technocratic power elite. Pynchon directly refers to "Gnostic" readings of Tarot cards and a film within the book in order to suggest broader thematic implications about heretical resistance to orthodoxy (747, 429). In particular, he associates the conspiratorial "Rocket-Cartel" with the Roman Catholic Church and describes rebels

against this technocratic order as "heretics" and "Gnostics" (727). He also alludes to the "Cainite" or "Cainist" sect of Gnosticism in order to construct and celebrate the heresy of the character William Slothrop (429, 556). Pynchon's references to the Cainists suggest that his primary source of historical knowledge about the Gnostics was Jonas, who devotes a sub-section of his book to this sect (94-96).

Cincinnatus, the protagonist of Nabokov's Invitation to a Beheading, endures his imprisonment for the crime of "gnostical turpitude" by relying on an inner knowledge of transcendent selfhood and the hope of return to a better, otherworldly realm (13). Nabokov repeatedly describes the prison-world in which Cincinnatus is trapped as a cosmic mistake perpetrated by a deluded creator, and he alludes to Cincinnatus' knowledge of an inner "spark" that originates in a higher, spiritual realm of freedom (91-93, 90, 94-95, 136). In Worlds in Regression, D. Barton Johnson suggests the Russian Symbolists as sources of Nabokov's Gnostic and Neoplatonic ideas and imagery (2). Because Nabokov composed Invitation to a Beheading in 1934, his historical knowledge of Gnosticism must have also been mediated by the existentialist and Jungian commentaries on the Gnostics prevalent at this time.

In Dick's VALIS trilogy, twentieth-century equivalents of an underground Gnostic organization seek a *gnosis* or "divine invasion" that could help them to overcome "the black iron prison" of an invisible, archontic postmodern police state (VALIS 49). Dick frequently alludes to the Nag Hammadi texts in order to describe the search of his semi-autobiographical protagonist, Horselover Fat, for freedom in an insane world ruled by deluded authorities. A psychiatrist gives Fat a copy of the Nag Hammadi text "On the

Origin of the World," which Dick quotes to suggest that the authorities regarded as sane in the early 1970's might actually be the insane equivalents of the Demiurge in his incarnation as "Samael," or the "Blind God" (64-65). Dick repeatedly refers to the archeological discovery of the Nag Hammadi texts and uses the vocabulary of Gnosticism to dramatize the rebellion of "early secret Christians" against a conspiratorial "Empire." As Dick's biographer Lawrence Sutin observes in Divine Invasions, Dick became aware of Gnosticism through an essay by Jung called "Transformation Symbolism in the Mass" (128). He acquired a positive, somewhat romanticized view of the Gnostics from Jung, which prompted him to read Jonas (whom he repeatedly cites in his novel). Dick broadened his understanding of Gnosticism through his reading of the 1977 first edition of the Nag Hammadi library in English.

Although some scholarly investigation has already been produced regarding Gnosticism in postmodern fiction, many potentially rich lines of inquiry remain unexplored. Much of the existing scholarship points out Gnostic ideas or images within a single author and offers some commentary on the thematic relevance of these elements, yet these close readings are by no means exhaustive. Despite producing acute critical insights, many critics display only a cursory familiarity with historical Gnostic beliefs, leaving ample room for new interpretative discoveries and in some cases substantial alteration of critical frameworks. In addition, there has been no full comparative examination of the similarities between the various late twentieth century fictions that utilize Gnosticism. Many critics offer little rigorous explanation for why numerous postmodern novelists would draw on an obscure second-century heresy in a

predominantly secular intellectual climate. Moreover, although ample textual evidence and suggestions of authorial intention exist to support a heretical reading of these texts, this evidence would inevitably be reduced by deconstruction to pandemic textuality. Similarly, a New Historical approach would dismiss this evidence as inadvertent complicity in prevailing discourses of power. A method of reading makes a richer discussion of freedom possible in the contemporary academy by suggesting that these poststructuralist reductions need not take place.

A method of reading is thus necessary to account comprehensively for the structural analogies between the Gnostic worldview, postmodern fiction, and the postmodern condition as a larger cultural phenomenon.[i] A method of reading would allow one to systematically engage with the ways that these structural parallels between postmodern fiction and Gnosticism *challenge* existing theoretical formulations of postmodernity. Gnosticism operates as a generative narrative structure that allows Pynchon, Dick, and Nabokov to represent the struggle for freedom by people who have been denied it. If read through Gnosticism, these postmodern fictions allow freedom to be conceptualized in ways that are forbidden by poststructuralist theorizations of the postmodern condition. Heretical reading centers around Gnostic interpretations of postmodern fiction, but it also treats several forms of discourse—religious, fictional, and critical—as entities within a greater contest. [ii] The historical contextualist investigation of authorial intention and influence study serves the greater purpose of enabling a conversation between texts and the interpretative strategies applied to them. The struggle of Gnostic rebels against archontic villains within these novels closely resembles the

conflict between heretical reading and poststructuralist interpretative strategies, as well as the situation of Gnosticism in relation to the emerging Christian orthodoxy that attempted to suppress it. Because of these parallels, the novels can be read as enacting the conflicts between the approaches applied to them, so that the archontic characters within the novels represent poststructuralist methods. This meta-critical interpretation extends the text beyond the conscious intentions of the authors in order to bring the inquiry into the present moment of the discipline of literary studies. However, I justify this extension by demonstrating deeply intertwined formal affinities between postmodern novels with Gnostic elements, the historical reception of Gnosticism, and the interpretative conflicts over postmodern fiction. Heretical reading thus generates an extensive disciplinary conversation that reads Gnostic-influenced postmodern fictions to contest the very theorizations of the postmodern condition that seemingly facilitate but actually limit the interpretation of these novels.

Heretical reading begins by analyzing how Pynchon, Nabokov, and Dick adapt the Gnostics' mythic narrative of the archons in order to describe the paranoid sense of demonized and all-pervasive power characteristic of the postmodern condition. Gravity's Rainbow, Invitation to a Beheading, and VALIS all appropriate the Gnostic worldview of a dark and empty cosmos ruled over by sinister and shadowy beings. These archons use their power to both physically and mentally imprison their subjects within the military-industrial "Rocket-State" depicted in Gravity's Rainbow, the "Black Iron Prison" in VALIS, and the isolated fortress in Invitation to a Beheading. All three authors exhibit an awareness of the historical tensions symbolized by the Gnostics' mythological

conception of the universe, in which the oppressive order of the archons in part represented the Gnostic resistance to an emerging Christian orthodoxy. In postmodern fictions, the archons' power often operates through the control of discourse and the ideological restriction of the imagination, and the archons serve as a metaphor for hegemony. A complex and multifaceted parallel thus exists between the Gnostics' mythological representation of the archons, the ancient historical tensions encoded in this myth, and the hegemonies and state apparatuses that postmodern authors represent by drawing on both mythology and history.

In order to respond to the postmodern dilemma of hegemonic control represented through the archons, all three authors also create narratives of Gnostic characters who resist hegemony through acts of critique that undermine an oppressive system's claims to be real, natural, or inevitable. For example, Pynchon dramatizes the struggle of the Counterforce against the Rocket-Cartel, Nabokov celebrates Cincinnatus' defiance of his jail warders, and Dick imagines "early secret Christians" who work to demolish the Black Iron Prison (VALIS 49). Because these narratives are highly metafictional and metainterpretative, they often represent acts of critique in ways that resemble deconstructive operations. Characters become metafictionally aware that they inhabit novels and thereby cause these worlds to collapse, as when Cincinnatus destroys the prison by denying its reality or Osbie Feel proves to Katje Borgesius that the conspiratorial plots of the rocket-cartel are actually only the plot of a novel (Invitation 223, Gravity's Rainbow 536). These metafictional epiphanies mirror the deconstructive

interpretative enterprise to break down restrictive structures by demonstrating their linguistic and ideological constructedness.

While the consciousness of hegemonic control and an attempt to resist it constitute important early steps in heretical reading, each author reads and appropriates Gnosticism in order to provide a more efficacious basis for freedom in the form of presence and transcendence. Specifically, these authors draw upon the Gnostic image of sparks of divinity scattered through a world of darkness in order to depict spatially and temporally localized intimations of reality and divinity. In response to prevailing postmodern skepticism toward the ability of language and consciousness to reach an originary realm of Platonic ideas, the novels describe presence and transcendence as intrusions into the world rather than avenues of retreat from it. The textual instantiations of the sparks of presence and transcendence sparks stand out against a background of more conventional representations of postmodernity as empty and entropic.

The presence of fragmentary sparks allows them to be known by human beings in the form of liberating intimations, which are tentative hints and suggestions that nevertheless have epistemological validity. In contrast to poststructuralist negative knowledge in the form of skeptical debunking, *gnosis* offers the affirmative knowledge of a possibility of presence. *Gnosis* is often simultaneously metaphysical and metafictional, because characters realize that they inhabit a fiction but also have the dim intuition that there is a world outside of this fiction that is "real," or at least more real than their own. This metafictional epiphany can be read not just as a metaphor for the poststructuralist concept that restrictive ideologies are socially constructed and therefore in some sense

"unreal," but that there may be other realities that are more real than our own. Each author conceptualizes knowledge differently according to the values of his own fictional universe. Thus, Pynchon's *gnosis* brings spontaneous, immediate, and sometimes subversively comic glimpses of the splinters of reality excluded by the conspiracies that have conditioned characters' perceptions. Nabokov's *gnosis* focuses on luminously precise and specific details in nature and art, such as the glowing puddle bearing a code message in Bend Sinister. Dick's *gnosis* takes the form of the improved cognition of transcendent knowledge modeled as spiritualized information, which "extricates" its receiver from the constraints of despair and indecision.

A crucial component of this *gnosis* is navigational knowledge, which has implications on the level of the novels' plots, their interpretation, and hypertext pedagogy. For the ancient Gnostics, the "knowledge of the way" designated the secret lore involving paths and passwords by which one could escape the labyrinthine universe of the archons (Jonas 45). In postmodern fiction, this disorienting universe manifests itself in what Pynchon calls "disquieting structures," such as the Counterforce Hell, Cincinnatus' maze-like prison, and the "living maze" described by Mini in VALIS (Gravity's Rainbow 537, Invitation to a Beheading 77, VALIS 185-86). Characters in these novels become aware of their constraint by being lost in imprisoning structures of extreme complexity, which are often also metaphorical constructs composed of information. Progress toward freedom requires that one learn to navigate within these structures, a skill which involves finding pathways and distinguishing reliable information from the deceptive illusions of the archons. In keeping with Harold Bloom's

and Erik Davis' association of Gnosticism and information theory, postmodern authors frequently represent *gnosis* through the cybernetic metaphor of information retrieval and transmission, which involves filtering signal from noise. Characters also learn to navigate networks of information by making linkages between apparently disparate facts and entities in order to discern hidden and malevolent conspiracies. By acquiring these navigational skills, characters learn to evade the restrictive authorities of their worlds and to move with increased freedom within these universes despite the lack of an escape route into a *pleroma*.

Confronting disorientation and the necessity of finding a path can lead to a liberating, spiritual awareness of self, which all three authors represent as a spark within that responds to sparks outside. This self-awareness is reached by a process of intense skepticism toward the self in which one confronts all the ways in which aspects of one's identity have been constructed and controlled by various cultural and linguistic structures. By recognizing and interrogating the influence of these determinisms, characters eventually reach a "core" of essential selfhood that is free. This true self is simultaneously "other" from both the world and one's habitual subject position, yet it is immensely reliable and free because it is an intrusion of transcendent presence. In Nabokov's terms, this is the "radiant point" at the center of Cincinnatus' identity that constitutes an "other Cincinnatus" free from his everyday limitations (Invitation to a Beheading 136, 222). In VALIS, Horselover Fat experiences a similar "divine invasion" of his rational mind by a spiritual selfhood that overwhelms his everyday identity but nevertheless allows him to resist his own destructive and imprisoning behavior. Pynchon

hints at an analogous possibility through the final "feather" that remains even after Slothrop has plucked "the albatross of self"—a remnant of identity that might begin to reverse the diminished "temporal bandwidth" of his dissolving subjectivity (Gravity's Rainbow 623, 509).

All three authors represent a final stage of freedom as choice, which they model as the liberty to navigate a path that has been blocked off by an orthodoxy. Pynchon represents William Slothrop's Gnostic-influenced heresy as the freedom to take an alternate path at a crucial fork in American religious thought (Gravity's Rainbow 556). Dick describes a Gnostic computer game of proliferating universes in which salvation consists in taking an alternative branch away from tyranny, and Nabokov depicts Cincinnatus' final rebellion as an insistence on his freedom of movement away from the site of his execution. These possibilities of navigation are also enacted in the textuality of these novels, which often invite readers to make interpretative choices in the manner of a "choose-your-own adventure" book or a hypertext fiction. While poststructuralists describe textuality in terms of proliferating networks, the previous three forms of freedom allow for richer and more genuine opportunities for choice within these networks.

Chapter three extends the concept of freedom as navigational choice into the pedagogical use of hypertext, the electronic textual format of the World Wide Web. As with postmodern novels, the fashionable approach to technological pedagogy and hypertext is poststructuralism, but heretical reading can advance the emancipatory goals of technology and pedagogy more effectively than poststructuralism alone. The heretical

version of hypertext pedagogy follows the same goals of freedom as question and process sought through a heretical reading of a postmodern novel. Hypertext pedagogy complements proto-hypertextual novels with electronic hypertexts, which include both existing literary web resources and sites designed specifically for the class. Teachers build pedagogical environments for students and instruct them in web navigation skills, introducing a degree of deliberate disorientation as a heuristic device to help students learn to find their way to the textual and contextual information required to interpret difficult fictions.

The "sparks" in postmodern appropriations of Gnosticism correspond to hypertext "lexia" or nodes that stand out with particular imaginative and intuitive significance against a background of indeterminacy. These nodes provide knowledge of the intimations of presence and transcendence needed to invent an essay topic, which guides the selection and organization of supporting information. The *gnosis* sought through hypertext pedagogy allows an interpreter to find a path out of the aporia of indeterminacy created by deconstructive reading strategies. Hypertext pedagogy fosters a spirituality constituting self-awareness, which offers a sense of "interior direction" required to navigate through the composition of an essay. For a student writing a hypertext essay, the experience of inner selfhood can be encouraged by searching for personally meaningful links and lexia within novels and supplemental hypertexts, which encourage active examination of how one responds to possible interpretative options. Eventually, confrontation with conditioned responses encourages the student to determine what aspects of themselves are drawn most deeply and creatively to particularly generative

lexia within the text. Heretical reading thus includes an element of free reader response that enables students to select a personally relevant essay topic and to design a structure appropriate to it.

Students then create web-based interpretative essays that treat choice navigationally rather than hierarchically. Instead of modeling argument as an agonistic attempt to dominate a previous interpretation, these essays acknowledge a network of possible interpretations while justifying the forkings and linkages that constitute a heretical interpretative path. These opportunities can be intensified pedagogically by teaching students to write hypertext essays that contest previous interpretative orthodoxies by creating and taking pathways that have been excluded by other critics. The model for these essays is heresy rather than agon, since they do not primarily use rhetorical tropes to reverse privilege in the style of negative deconstruction. At the same time, these essays do not stop by collapsing binaries into the equally prescriptive third terms of affirmative deconstruction. Instead, students construct essays by focusing on particular lexia or "sparks" of the real and the transcendent that their selves respond to on a deep level. Students use hypertext to creatively link these lexia, but these linkages are not based solely on their own interests or agendas. Rather, students choose personally meaningful paths through the texts that they can justify on the basis of textual evidence and contextual suggestions of possible authorial intention. Heretical reading thus differs from Bloomian "strong misreading," which agonistically struggles against the intentions of the text and a previous reader in order to dominate his reading through rhetorical strength. Instead of establishing a new interpretative hierarchy, heretical reading

involves navigationally choosing and justifying a path that another interpreter has rejected or excluded. Students choose their paths on the basis of the predispositions of their own most inner and idiosyncratic selves as they respond to fragments of the real and the transcendent within a text.

Chapter four is a speculative conclusion of the dissertation which discusses the use of interactive fiction for teaching postmodern novels in the undergraduate classroom. Interactive fictions (often abbreviated "IF") are text-based, narrative computer games recently theorized as a form of New Media or cybertext. Interactive fiction describes locations and events in a simulated world, which the player can respond to by inputting text commands that shape the story by prompting the main character to act in particular ways. The game elements of interactive fiction make them a well-suited model for teaching postmodern novels, which often highlight their own status as games with serious philosophical, ethical, and emotional implications. This chapter draws upon my own experiences teaching The Crying of Lot 49 and Pale Fire in an undergraduate literature course.

Heretical reading seeks to transform printed novels into interactive fictions in order to encourage freedom in the form of interaction, allowing classroom discussion to change the ways the text is imagined and experienced. The convictions underlying heretical reading function within the classroom as a set of rules, but these rules are designed to open up, not to constrain; to energetically orient, not to govern; to yield satisfactions at the expressive level, not to conclude. These rules function most effectively to encourage freedom rather than to restrict it when they are suggested

aesthetically rather than declared didactically. The text is to be imagined as a geographic and conceptual space akin to a labyrinth through which students can move in the course of discussions. In order to gain this navigational agency, students must exert effort to solve "puzzles" in the form of cognitive challenges with thematic implications. As D.G. Jerz argues, interactive fiction can accommodate a variety of responses that permit a broader range of free interaction than the branching and linking structures of hypertext because interactive fiction allows input from the reader in the form of suggestions for what the main character should do ("An Annotated Bibliography"). However, since interactive fiction challenges the problem-solving abilities of readers, it also encourages them to skeptically question their freedom by emphasizing that it can only be won by hard analytical work. I use the metaphor of the "puzzle" from interactive fiction theory—a term for any challenge that must be solve to progress further in the story—as a metaphor for interpretative challenges. By constructing lesson plans as a balance of narrative and puzzles that can be explored from a variety of interpretative approaches and in various orders, one can create maximum interpretative freedom while at the same time preventing the unproductive chaos that results from an unstructured lack of preparation. An aesthetic of surrealism and mystery, created by amplifying artistic effects within the text, helps convey the rule that possibilities of presence and transcendence should be kept open rather than dismissed as irrational or absurd. A final rule prevents totalizing resolution in order to convince students that apparent indeterminacy is actually an opportunity to assert a thesis about an aspect of the novel's meaning.

Heretical reading finally enacts the question and process of freedom whose existence it argues for. This method of reading constitutes a choice to read with spiritual self-awareness based on intimations of transcendent presence and liberating knowledge. The method does seek to overcome the limits that poststructuralism places upon freedom, but not primarily with the archontic intention of dominating poststructuralist ideology as an end in itself. In order to escape the confines of a skeptical liberation whose final result is the paralyzing confusion of *aporia*, heretical reading asserts the right to choose a path toward freedom seemingly closed off by the poststructuralist orthodoxy.

Chapter One: Gnosticism, Postmodern Fiction, and Deconstructive Critique

The myth of the Gnostics' rebellion against a group of oppressive archons functions as a generative narrative structure that allows Pynchon, Nabokov, and Dick to dramatize deeply imaginative fictions of individuals denied their freedom and struggling to regain it. Gnosticism plays a crucial role in these novels on the level of plot, character, and theme because Pynchon, Nabokov, and Dick deliberately read Gnosticism and the historical tradition of commentary on it in order to develop an artistic response to the postmodern condition. Since poststructuralist theories are also a response to the postmodern condition, postmodern narratives have traditionally been theorized through poststructuralism. Postmodern appropriations of Gnosticism do resemble poststructuralist theories in the challenge to critique and resistance that they present, but Gnostic-influenced postmodern fictions diverge from poststructuralist theories of postmodernity concerning the question of freedom. This chapter's Gnostic reading of Pynchon, Nabokov, and Dick conceptualizes freedom in four ways forbidden by poststructuralist theorizations of the postmodern condition. These four ways include freedom as presence and transcendence, as liberating knowledge, as spirituality constituting self-awareness, and as a version of agency and choice that is navigational rather than hierarchical. Because of the intense skepticism and radical uncertainty of the postmodern condition, these novels must represent freedom as a question, not as the confident declaration of a second-century Gnostic. Each of the four forms of freedom paves the way for the next one, so that freedom becomes a process in addition to a question.

The process of freedom represented in postmodern fictionalizations of Gnosticism can be summarized as follows. The world is largely an empty construction, a simulacral prison of absence and illusion ruled over by oppressive hegemonies and power elites. Nevertheless, individuals become aware of this archontic tyranny and rebel against it in order to recover the freedom that has been denied them. The struggle of the Gnostic characters against the archons often initially resembles the emancipatory poststructuralist ambition to resist and overthrow oppressive constructions. Hence, the Gnostics first seek to dissolve the fictionality of the archontic world through a deconstructive recognition of absence. However, a more positive freedom is possible because non-totalizing fragments of the real are scattered through the world in the manner of the Gnostic sparks. Some of these fragments are also transcendentally real, in that they enter the world from a transcendent realm independent of the material world or society. Because these sparks of transcendent presence exist, they can be partially known by human beings as intimations, and this knowledge is liberating. One crucial form of liberating knowledge is spirituality constituting the awareness of a transcendentally present self immune from conditioning or outward control. Knowledge of transcendent presence is liberating because it allows a basis for agency and choice outside of oppressive, deterministic social constructions. In order to avoid the archontic ambition for hierarchical domination, agency and choice manifest themselves as the proto-hypertextual freedom to choose between multiple possible forks in a path and multiple linkages between disparate entities. Specifically, agency is asserted through the individual or collective choice to take an alternate route from the orthodox one based on a transcendent intimation that this path is correct for

oneself or one's group. The liberating knowledge of transcendent presence and selfhood guides free choice.

An examination of the theme of freedom in the Gnostic worldview and scholarly commentary suggests the parallels between Gnosticism, postmodern fiction, and poststructuralism, as well as clarifying their point of divergence. Gnosticism has immense generative potential for literary narratives because it can be persuasively read as a story of individuals whose freedom has been denied and who are struggling to regain it. This underlying structure remains despite the layered historical mediation of postmodern authors' ideas of Gnosticism as well as changing scholarly conceptions of the definition of Gnosticism. The Gnostic concern with freedom appears in a wide variety of scholarly studies, both before and after the publication of the Nag Hammadi texts. Several scholars accept as a central tenet of Gnosticism that the world has been created by a malevolent Demiurge and his archontic rulers. These rulers attempt to imprison and enslave human beings through material entrapment and restrictive metaphysical and moral laws, including the deterministic rule of human destiny by the stars (Jonas 43, 55; Culiano 96, 102; Layton 16). Jonas vividly imagines this denial of freedom as a prison when he writes:

> The Archons collectively rule over the world, and each individually in his sphere is a warder of the cosmic prison. Their tyrannical world-rule is called *heimarmene*, universal Fate [. . .] In its physical aspect this rule is the law of nature; in its psychical aspect [. . .] it aims at the enslavement of man. (43)

Working closely with the Nag Hammadi texts, Layton includes this restriction of freedom in the "second act" of his version of the Gnostic myth: "Ialdabaōth and his fellow heavenly 'rulers' are possessive and arrogant and try to dominate all human affairs; their desire for domination leads them to create human sexual lust and the bond of destiny (control by the stars), by which they intend to enslave humanity" (16).

The Gnostic worldview also consistently depicts the quest for liberation from the archons and their oppressive rule. The Gnostics sought freedom through knowledge, called *gnosis*, of their connections to a transcendent divinity separate from the material world. This idea appears in the famous fragment from the Excerpts from Theodotus: "What makes us free is the knowledge who we were, what we have become; where we were, wherein we have been thrown; whereto we speed, wherefrom we are redeemed; what is birth and what rebirth" (Jonas 334). As Jonas puts it, "awakening and liberation is effected through 'knowledge'," a view that Pagels echoes when she dubs Gnosticism a quest for "human liberation [. . .] through internal transformation" (Jonas 44, Pagels 129). Culiano also praises the Gnostics as "champions of free thought" and concludes his study by arguing that scholarship of Gnosticism can help teach that "freedom of thinking out everything to its ultimate consequences should never be interfered with by any authority" (242, 269).

Gnostic concepts of restriction and liberation lend themselves to a variety of metaphorical interpretations and extensions. On the most overt theological level, Gnostic freedom means liberty from the constraints of material existence and of the archons who have created it. The "final act" of Layton's mythic drama summarizes the metaphysical

aspects of Gnostic freedom: "A heavenly savior has been sent to 'awaken' gnostic humanity, to give them acquaintance (*gnōsis*) with themselves and god, to free their souls from destiny and from bondage to the material body, and to teach them how to escape the influence of the malevolent rulers" (17). Jonas argues that this spiritual freedom entails an "antinomian libertinism" that he associates with the nihilistic radical freedom of the existentialists (46, 331-40). In contrast to these primarily metaphysical and mythical interpretations, Pagels views rebellion against the archons and the Demiurge primarily as metaphors for contestations of "spiritual authority" and the search for a non-hierarchical, egalitarian church (Pagels 38-42). Culiano sees the Gnostics as champions of the more general heretical freedom to speculatively explore philosophic explanations of the world forbidden by orthodoxy (242). Thus, while changing scholarship has created varied views of the kinds of freedom that the Gnostics sought, the emphasis on freedom itself has remained extremely pervasive in Gnostic texts and the scholarly narratives told about this sect.

Postmodern fictional transformations of Gnosticism also revolve primarily around the question of freedom. Some contemporary scholarship has recognized the centrality of Gnosticism in postmodern American novels, but this scholarship often does not observe the importance of the question of freedom to these fictions. Harold Bloom concisely and eloquently expresses the relevance of Gnosticism to Gravity's Rainbow in his introduction to Thomas Pynchon, in which he writes:

> For Pynchon, ours is the age of plastics and paranoia, dominated by the System. No one is going to dispute such a conviction [. . .] What is more startling about

> Pynchon is that he has found ways of representing the impulse to defy the System, even though both the impulse and its representations always are defeated. In the Zone (which is our cosmos as the Gnostics saw it, the *kenoma* or Great Emptiness) the force of the System, of They (whom the Gnostics called the Archons), is in some sense irresistible, as all overdetermination must be irresistible. Yet there is a Counterforce, hardly distinguished in its efficacy, but it never does (or can) give up. (2)

In Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, Charles Hohmann also explores the role of Gnosticism in the genesis and execution of the novel. He discusses multiple parallels between the Gnostic cosmology and Pynchon's fictional universe, including the identification of They with the archons (182, 191). However, Hohmann argues that Pynchon uses the Gnostic representational structure to engage the "problem of evil and existential authenticity," not primarily the question of freedom (193). Dwight Eddins's The Gnostic Pynchon bases its argument on a terminological error resulting from an inadequate understanding of the Gnostic hatred of and resistance to power. Eddins mistakenly argues that Pynchon uses the Gnostics to represent sadistic, "anti-human" forces that manipulate and dominate human beings, lust to transform life into inanimate objects, and worship death (4-5, 8, 12). Despite Eddin's many interpretative insights into the novel, his use of "gnosticism" as an explanatory model runs completely against the grain of the actual religious Gnostics of the secondary century and the historical tradition of commentary on them.[iii] Eddins also disregards or inadequately reads many of the direct references to Gnosticism in *Gravity's Rainbow*, which indicate Pynchon's

association of Gnosticism and heresy with rebellion against the oppressive forces of a technocratic orthodoxy.

Just as many critics have noted the relevance of Gnosticism to Pynchon's novels without fully explaining its thematic and theoretical significance, so several scholars have also demonstrated the role of Gnosticism in Nabokov's Invitation to a Beheading. Julian Moynahan first calls attention to these allusions in "A Russian Preface to Nabokov's Beheading" (14-15). Sergei Davydov then extensively explores the novel's Gnostic symbolism in "Teksty-Matreški" Vladimira Nabokova.[iv] Johnson helpfully analyzes the importance of Gnosticism and Neoplatonism in the structure of Nabokov's fictional cosmologies, particularly as manifested in a series of "nested," concentrically embedded spheres with otherworldly intimations or emanations passing from higher worlds to lower ones (2). Johnson also offers a historical contextualist explanation for these allusions by noting that both Neoplatonic and Gnostic ideas were "central ingredients of the Russian Symbolist movement," a literary group which Nabokov himself acknowledged as an influence (2, 5 note 7).[v] In "Spiralizing the Circle: The Gnostic Subtext in Nabokov's Invitation to a Beheading," Robert Grossmith declares that Gnosticism communicates "a central, perhaps the central significance of the novel," since "gnostic mythology provided [Nabokov] with the perfect symbolic language with which to express his own conception of infinite consciousness exiled in a finite world" (67). Similarly, Alexandrov argues that Invitation to a Beheading is a "recapitulation of Gnosticism's cosmic drama of redemption," and he concisely summarizes many of the novel's Gnostic elements (84-85). He reads these elements in terms of larger metaphysical concerns with the role of

"mimicry and artifice" in the natural world, as well as the artist's "cosmic synchronization" of disparate sensory elements (106).

While all of these studies offer useful interpretations of the role of Gnosticism in the genesis and execution of the novel, none of them reads Gnosticism primarily as a means of conceptualizing freedom in ways forbidden by poststructuralism. Grossmith does accurately observe that Cincinnatus' imagination offers him "brief glimpses of an ideal freedom," since his "imagination is precisely that part of him that cannot be confined" (56). However, Grossmith ultimately sees Invitation to a Beheading as primarily a metaphysical meditation on pure consciousness alienated in the physical world (56). Similarly, Alexandrov briefly mentions that the novel can be read in part as "a celebration of Cincinnatus' purely imaginative freedom in the face of death," but he also sees the main focus of the book as metaphysical (84). Metaphysical possibilities of presence and transcendence are indeed central to Invitation to a Beheading, but they occur within the context of a quest for emancipation. Gnosticism ultimately serves as a vehicle for dramatizing this quest, which acquires urgency through frighteningly vivid representations of confinement.

Of the three authors, Philip K. Dick is the most self-consciously aware of the representational necessities of the Gnostic worldview in his fiction, and many critics have corroborated his own statements of intention. In the lecture "How to Build a Universe That Doesn't Fall Apart Two Days Later," Dick frankly acknowledges affinities with the Gnostic worldview and the heretical position of this sect: "I have been accused of holding Gnostic ideas. I guess I do. At one time I would have been burned. But some of their

ideas intrigue me" (264). VALIS, the first volume of the VALIS trilogy, abounds in prominent allusions to Gnostic beliefs that play a central role in structuring the plot and communicating Horselover Fat's attempt to grapple with the ambiguous territory between madness and divine revelation. VALIS quotes directly from the Nag Hammadi texts and Hans Jonas's "Gnosticism" entry from the Encyclopedia of Philosophy and also repeatedly alludes to Gnostic ideas and mythological elements (64, 131-32, 60-63, 86-87). Like Pynchon, Dick is both encyclopedic and syncretic in his artistic use of mythological and religious sources, which vary greatly from novel to novel. Nonetheless, Gnosticism plays an important role in several of his early fictions, particularly The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch.[vi] VALIS draws especially heavily on Gnosticism, since it served a central function in Dick's attempt to fictionalize the visionary experiences that he underwent during February and March of 1974, which he referred to as "2-3-74." Dick's Exegesis, a journal that he used to speculate on the meaning of 2-3-74 and that eventually formed the basis for VALIS, contains several entries related to Gnosticism. One such entry summarizes Dick's version of "the ten major principles of the Gnostic revelation," and another is entitled "Outline in Abstract Form of a New Model of Reality Updating Historic Models, in Particular Those of Gnosticism and Christianity" (Shifting Realities 331-33, 326-27).

Dick never abandons the concerns with intimations of transcendent presence and the quest for freedom that Gnosticism helps him to express; hence, Gnostic ideas and allusions continue to surface prominently in his philosophical speculations and fictions even when they are not the main symbolic language. After VALIS, Dick moves toward

other mystical systems and esoteric traditions to account for 2-3-74 and inspire his fictions, such as the kabbalah in The Divine Invasion and the Dead Sea Scrolls of the Essenes in The Transmigration of Timothy Archer. However, several passages in these novels continue to use imagery and concepts related to Gnosticism, such as Herb Asher's *gnosis* in The Divine Invasion and Timothy Archer's speculations on Christ's function as liberator from "astral determinism" (Divine Invasion 174, The Transmigration of Timothy Archer 183, 191). Moreover, Dick's last letter to his long-time correspondent Patricia Warrick about 2-3-74 concludes, "I am onto it at last, and it *is* Gnosticism—radically redefined, but still Gnosticism" (Warrick 192, italics in original). The representational structures of Gnosticism continued to help Dick to generate ideas even when they were not ostensibly his primary concern.

Several critics have analyzed the generative role of Gnosticism in Dick's oeuvre, particularly VALIS.[vii] The prominence of Gnosticism in the construction of VALIS derives partly from Dick's access to the English translation of the Nag Hammadi texts, the archeological discovery of which constitutes a major plot-point in the novel. As Sutin explains, Dick wrote VALIS in 1978, based on Exegesis entries that he began compiling in 1974 (257). He was therefore able to draw upon the first edition of the English translation of the Nag Hammadi texts, published in 1977.[viii] Gnosticism in VALIS revolves around an entry from Fat's Exegesis, which reads "**In dormant seed form, as living information, the plasmate slumbered in the buried library of codices at Chenoboskion**" until 1945 C.E (VALIS 60, boldface in original). Chenoboskion is another name for Nag Hammadi, the village in Egypt where the texts were discovered, as

Fat explains to one of his psychiatrists (60). Fat's imaginative interpretation of the Nag Hammadi texts concisely defines *gnosis* as the reception or retrieval of salvational information unimpeded by noise, a parallel between Gnosticism and information theory that Dick works out in detail throughout the VALIS trilogy. *Gnosis* in VALIS is potentially liberating, as it assists the revolutionary efforts of the "early secret Christians," who are Dick's version of the Gnostic revolutionary Counterforce. Gnosticism serves as a generative structure for the quest for freedom in ways that both corroborate and complement the fictions of Pynchon and Nabokov. Fat suggests the generative potential of the Gnostic mythos when he explains the significance of the "living information" found in Nag Hammadi in terms of Christ's parable of the mustard seed. Weaving together Christianity, Gnosticism, and information theory, Fat identifies this information as *logos* capable of "replicating not through information" or "in information, but as information. This is what Jesus meant when he spoke elliptically of the 'mustard seed' which, he said, 'would grow into a tree large enough for birds to roost in'" (61). Like the "mustard seed" in the parable to which Dick alludes, the Gnostic mythos as understood by Dick functions as a generative structure that expands into a sprawling, intricate, and meaningful fiction. Culiano envisions the generative potential of Gnosticism similarly when he writes that "The generative model of gnostic systems *is* actually a Tree, the Tree of Gnosis" and explains that "from a seed, Gnosis grows into a tree that starts to split into branches" (242, italics in original).

The Struggle of the Gnostic Counterforce against the Archons in Pynchon, Dick, and Nabokov

The type of archontic oppression represented and the freedom sought vary from novel to novel, thus testifying to the generative richness of the Gnostic cosmology. In Pynchon, the Counterforce struggles against a technocratic power elite, manifested in a multinational rocket-cartel known alternately as "the System" or "They." In Nabokov, individuals struggle for the liberty to pursue imaginative and scientific endeavors in defiance of a totalitarian, philistine state whose archontic representatives demand conformity and mediocrity. In Dick, rational individuals rebel against a hegemonic structure known as the "Empire" or the "Black Iron Prison," embodied in institutional and governmental authorities whose irrationality is symptomatic of the insane or "occluded" nature of the universe. Direct allusions to Gnosticism help to dramatize the struggle for freedom in each author's fictions. In all three cases, the oppressors are archontic not only because of their tyrannical domination but because of the darkly numinous, otherworldly character of this power. Shadowy, demonic, and grotesque, the ruling authorities in novels by Pynchon, Nabokov, and Dick are frequently intimated to be representatives not only of secular power but also of a deeply flawed and malevolent metaphysical order.

Gnostic mythology first of all resembles the postmodern condition in its representation of a shadowy group of oppressive rulers analogous to the concept of hegemony and, more specifically, to "the power elite" described by C. Wright Mills. The word "archon" means "ruler" or "magistrate" in Greek, and it descends etymologically from the Greek "árchein," meaning "to be first, rule" (Webster's Dictionary). It is related to the root "arch," which appears in words like "hierarchy." The word "archon" thus

evokes the postmodern distrust of invisible, ubiquitous, and oppressive structures of power, embodied politically in the Marxist concept of "hegemony." As Tony Hilfer explains in The New Hegemony, a hegemony is an oppressive system that restricts the boundaries of discourse through the operation of ideologies that represent the system's key assumptions as inevitable and unquestionable (xi-xii). The etymological roots of "archon" also suggest the deconstructionist hostility toward "origins," which Derrida often links to the root "*arche*."[ix] As demonic forces ruling over the created world, the archons vividly evoke a deep-seated fear of power that might be characterized as "paranoid," bearing in mind that postmodern authors frequently suggest that paranoia may be a heightened form of insight rather than a pathological disorder. Pynchon thus argues that there may be "something comforting—religious, if you want—about paranoia" because it ascribes an extreme degree of significance, connectedness, and pattern to misfortunes that might otherwise seem despairingly random (434). Hertzberg and McClelland corroborate these ideas in their classic essay "Paranoia" when they posit a "connection between madness and transcendental experience," tersely expressed in the dictum that "paranoia is the very opposite of meaninglessness; indeed, paranoia drenches every detail of the world with meaning" (181).

Although archontic imagery helps to describe and account for suggestions of the numinous sometimes associated with postmodern paranoia, these mythic figures also suggest a nightmarish sense of power as ubiquitous, arcane, and difficult to perceive. In City of Words, Tanner describes this attitude as a postmodern American "dread that someone else is patterning your life, that there are all sorts of invisible plots afoot to rob

you of your autonomy of thought and action, that conditioning is ubiquitous" (15). This fear manifests itself as a literary "paranoia" instantiated in "narrative lines [. . .] full of hidden persuaders, hidden dimensions, plots, secret organizations, evil systems, all kinds of conspiracies against spontaneity of consciousness, even cosmic take-over" (16). Tanner's appendices place these anxieties about mediation and control within the context of a variety of theories emerging during the 40's and 50's, including structuralist linguistics, cultural anthropology, and behaviorist psychology. Taken together, this theoretical context gave rise to concerns about "the problematical and ambiguous relationship of the self to patterns of all kinds" (15). As Tanner suggests in his chapters on Burroughs and Pynchon, this "nightmare of being controlled by unseen agencies" can encourage thinking in "Manichaean" imagery (155). The same set of anxieties can even result in narrative "demonology" and a sense of "demonized reality" if the figures of power and the power elite become sufficiently externalized, ubiquitous, and invisible (119, 175). Tanner does not directly mention the Gnostics *per se*, yet his allusions to the related movement of the Manichaeans suggest his awareness of ancient parallels to the postmodern nightmares he describes.

Pynchon's use of Gnosticism to represent the rebellion of the Counterforce against a technocratic power elite appears throughout Gravity's Rainbow. This application of Gnosticism to the struggle of the Counterforce against the System in Gravity's Rainbow is justified by numerous central references to Gnosticism, each of which can be read in terms of a heretical struggle for freedom against an archontic orthodoxy. The narratorial explication of Weissman's tarot cards in Gravity's Rainbow

constitutes one key example of Pynchon's use of Gnosticism to dramatize the struggle for freedom, which he himself models in terms of a reading method. Weissman, a central representative of the Rocket Cartel or "System," is a Nazi whose code name "Dominus Blicero" ("Lord Death") suggests his position as the monarch of the technocrats. Weissman's "covering" card, the card that symbolizes his current situation, is "The Tower." This eerie and resonant image evokes mysterious commentary by a narrator, who reflects:

> It is a puzzling card, and everybody has a different story on it. It shows a bolt of lightning striking a tall phallic structure, and two figures, one wearing a crown, falling from it. Some read ejaculation, and leave it at that. Others see a Gnostic or Cathar symbol for the Church of Rome, and this is generalized to mean any System which cannot tolerate heresy: a system which, by its nature, must sooner or later fall. We know by now that it is also the Rocket. (747)

In this passage, the association of the rocket with a technocratic, Roman Catholic orthodoxy appears explicitly, and the Gnostics' hatred of this order and desire to overthrow it manifests itself in the explosion of the Tower. This reading of the card aligns the "System," whose capital "S" evokes all the countercultural distrust of oppression and abused power, with the Roman Catholic Church. Pynchon further solidifies this identification when Tchitcherine, a renegade Russian soldier convinced that a conspiracy has excluded him from "revelations" about the rocket 00000, imagines the Rocket-Cartel as "sovereign . . . as the Church of Rome" (566). The Gnostics both dissented from and rebelled against the Catholic church, which they regarded as the

promulgator of an officially sanctioned yet unenlightened distortion of Christianity.[x] In the Gnostic or Cathar reading, a system which cannot tolerate heresy must fall, presumably by its inability to recognize its own incompleteness.

The archontic and technocratic attempt to suppress Gnostic, heretical freedom appears clearly in one of the extended and complex passages on heresy in Gravity's Rainbow. Pynchon writes that "the rocket has to be many things, it must answer to a number of different shapes in the dreams of those who touch it—in combat, in tunnel, on paper—it must survive heresies shining, unconfoundable . . . and heretics there will be." These heretics include "Gnostics who have been taken in a rush of wind and fire to chambers of the Rocket-throne" (727). Weisenburger interprets this phrase as signaling Pynchon's conflation of Gnosticism with kabbalistic mysticism, a linkage that occurs because of Pynchon's research into Gershom Scholem's works (301). In Kabbalah, Scholem associates Merkabah mysticism, an early Jewish form of spiritual practice involving visionary ascent to the throne of God in a prophetic chariot, with Gnosticism. He argues that "the mysteries of the world of the Throne, together with those of the Divine Glory which is revealed there, are the parallels in Jewish esoteric tradition to the revelations on [sic] the realm of the divine in Gnosticism" (11). Eddins ascribes greater and darker aspirations for power to the heretics than Weisenburger. In keeping with an overall terminological misuse of Gnosticism, Eddins condemns the heresies in the passage as "mere specialized branchings of the gnosticism at the heart of the novel, all bound by [. . .] the notion of absolute technological control" (138).

However, further specific investigation of the Gnostic tradition, rather than Scholem's conflation with the kabbalah or Eddins' reliance on Voegelin, can better account for Pynchon's description of the Gnostic visions. Ascent in the Gnostic vision involves not the seeking of a position of power and dominance, but a defiance or evasion of the archons on their thrones in order to win freedom. Jonas explains that this was the goal of Gnostic ascent, and the Gnostics memorized many passwords and formulas for the purpose of resisting the archons (43-44, 135). For the Gnostics, the God worshipped by the Merkabah mystics would have been regarded as the demiurge, sometimes known as Ialdabaoth and located on a "throne" at the uppermost boundary of the archontic cosmos (Apocryphon of John 110). Hence, being "taken in a rush of wind and fire to the chamber of the Rocket-throne" can signify a confrontation of technocratic power as much as a worship of it. The interpretation of rebellious confrontation is more consistent with Pynchon's overall thematic use of heresy, which tends to be associated with the defiance of a technocratic, elitist military-industrial complex.

In addition to authorial statements of sympathy with heresy in his open letter to Salamn Rushdie—in which Pynchon proclaims "our duty as heretics" to resist "power" and "unreason"— the passage that directly follows the Gnostic reference supports this interpretation (29). This passage depicts a technocratic orthodoxy that seeks to systematically destroy the individual, experiential response of the rocket-heretics with cold efficiency and mechanical "silence":

> But these heretics will be sought and the dominion of silence will enlarge as each one goes down [. . .] they will *all* be sought out. Each will have his personal

> Rocket. Stored in its target-seeker will be the heretic's EEG, the spikes and susurrations of heartbeat, the ghost-blossomings of personal infared, each Rocket will know its intended and hunt him, ride him a green-doped and silent hound, through our World, shining and pointed in the sky at his back, his guardian executioner rushing in, *rushing closer*. (727)

The interpretation of this passage, and of Pynchon's use of Gnosticism, hinges upon the archontic intolerance of "heresy" and desire to destroy it. This intolerance also appears in the Gnostic interpretation of the Tower as "the Rocket," associated with the orthodox "Church of Rome" and "generalized to mean any System which cannot tolerate heresy" (747). According to the narrator, the technocratic archons design the rocket to be both monolithic and polysemically suggestive. The rocket "has to be many things" so that it can inspire the quasi-mystical "dreams" necessary to motivate engineers to devote themselves to it, as Franz Pökler does. Franz Pökler allows himself to be gradually enslaved into the cartel's production of death, initially because of his idealized and aestheticized dreams of the rocket's potential for transcendence (154, 400). The cartel deliberately plays on these "dreams" in the minds of the engineers who test it "in tunnel, on paper," but technocracy cannot tolerate these dreams if they evolve into the full-fledged heresy of mystical knowledge. An individual human response to technology, such as that of the rocket-heretics, is ultimately both subversive and threatening to a rationalized order. Hence, the "Rocket-state" must go to great lengths to assassinate the heretics that threaten it, while at the same time grudgingly realizing that the heresies are "shining and unconfoundable" (727). "Shining and unconfoundable" may also refer back

to the antecedent "it," suggesting that the "rocket" must survive because it maintains an appearance of purity and irrefutable orthodoxy despite proliferating heresies. In either reading, the rocket state must suppress the heresies that threaten its existence and hegemonic domination.

In Invitation to a Beheading, Nabokov uses Gnosticism to dramatize a similar struggle for freedom against a totalitarian state that regards knowledge of the transcendent as the crime of "gnostical turpitude" (72). Whereas Pynchon's characters are deprived of their freedom through insidious, conspiratorial, and often invisible means, Nabokov's protagonist Cincinnatus finds himself literally incarcerated in a prison housed within an "enormous fortress" (13). This setting corresponds to Jonas's description of the Gnostic cosmology, in which "The universe, the domain of the Archons, is like a vast prison whose innermost dungeon is the earth, the scene of man's life" (43). Whereas several characters in Gravity's Rainbow struggle slowly toward the realization that they are being controlled—as in Bodine's lament that "m' prison's whurever I be"—Cincinnatus is imprisoned for his crime of "gnostical turpitude" at the beginning of the novel (Gravity's Rainbow 369, Invitation 72) . While this representation of oppression is physical and concrete in Nabokov, it resonates with multiple symbolic implications, and these complexities also raise intricate questions about the nature of freedom.

Nabokov represents the forces of restriction and imprisonment through the archontic beings that manage the prison in which Cincinnatus is incarcerated. Whereas the archons in Gravity's Rainbow are a technocratic, demonic "They" whose sinister manipulations are evident to characters but often difficult for them to locate directly,

Cincinnatus's grotesque jailers are more tangibly archontic. Jonas explains of the archons that "each individually in his sphere is a warder of the cosmic prison," and the archontic forces who guard Cincinnatus literally are prison warders (43). While these jailers are more grotesque than demonically menacing, they nonetheless devote themselves to the traditional archontic mission: to "prevent escape from the world," "obstruct knowledge" of the transcendent, and enforce adherence to a "tyrannical" metaphysical and moral law (Jonas 42-43). Rodrig Ivanovich, the prison director, and his assistant Rodion watch over Cincinnatus constantly and prevent his physical escape, and they also interrupt the imaginative, literary, and spiritual exercises by which he attempts to transcend their world. They literally obstruct his knowledge of his own situation by withholding the date and circumstances of his execution, and they torment him with false hopes of pardon or escape. These include a faked jailbreak by a tunnel that actually leads into the adjacent cell of his future headsman, somewhat as each archontic sphere leads into another sphere. In keeping with the archontic obsession with law, they urge him to conform to absurd bureaucratic rigmarole and then bemoan his refusal to "stay within legitimate limits" (37). Like the archons, they also attempt to beguile Cincinnatus with bodily temptations, particularly sexuality, that will encourage him to remain attached to his physical existence. The director partially reveals this goal when muttering during a chess game, "Generally speaking, of the numerous earthly temptations, which, in jest, but really with the utmost seriousness, I intend to submit gradually for your consideration, the temptation of sex . . ." (144). Rodion also interrupts Cincinnatus' "criminal exercise"

of bodily "divestment" by bringing a basket of plums, a gift of food which the ascetic Cincinnatus refuses (33).[xi]

The prison also exhibits puzzling architectural qualities that prevent or impede escape, as when Cincinnatus struggles up and down stairs and notices that "the fortress must have suffered a mild stroke, as the descending stairs were in reality ascending and vice versa" (213). His attempted escape while walking the prison's corridors merely brings him back to his starting point, since "the bends in the corridor had not been leading him anywhere, but rather formed a great polyhedron" (77). Thus, the very structure of the prison—a paradoxical space of optical illusions in the manner of M.C. Escher—reflects the convoluted and treacherous difficulties of a quest for freedom.[xii] Like the labyrinthine corridors that form the "disquieting structure" of Pynchon's Counterforce hell, Nabokov's prison suggests that any overly simplistic reliance on intellect or imagination to escape oppression has a tendency to lead the escapee directly back into his confinement (Gravity's Rainbow 537).[xiii]

Because of the difficulties of emancipation in a world conceived as a metaphysical and political prison, any narrative taking place in such a setting must necessarily be a struggle for freedom that simultaneously questions the nature of freedom. The relationship between Cincinnatus' confinement and the question of freedom appears clearly in his first attempt to take stock of his own precise position. Cincinnatus concisely expresses his own predicament and its Gnostic elements:

> Accused of the most terrible of crimes, gnostical turpitude, so rare and so unutterable that it was necessary to use circumlocutions like 'impenetrability,'

> ‘opacity,’ ‘occlusion’; sentenced for that crime to death by beheading; emprisoned in the fortress in expectation of the unknown but near and inexorable date. (73)

Cincinnatus thus recognizes that the dystopian community has imprisoned him because it regards his *gnosis* as criminally obscure and opaque, in contrast to the vapid and “transparent” ignorance of his fellow citizens.

Like Nabokov in Invitation to a Beheading, Dick uses Gnosticism to dramatize the struggle for freedom of his semi-autobiographical protagonist Horselover Fat, as well as to depict a collective quest for freedom against a hegemonic structure of institutionalized insanity or “occlusion.” In VALIS, the forces that deny freedom do so because they are “occluded,” Dick’s word for “blinded” or “deluded” (65). They therefore seek to impose the limitations of their vision on others in the form of ideological restrictions or the legal constraints of a police state. Dick draws explicitly on Gnostic ideas of the Demiurge to convey these limitations, and to do so he quotes directly from the Nag Hammadi texts. Because Dick associates the loss of freedom with mental derangement, both key references to the Demiurge occur during Fat’s conversations with two of his psychiatrists, Dr. Stone and Maurice. Dr. Stone, unusually learned in esoteric religious doctrines and oddly sympathetic to Fat’s wild theories, invokes the Gnostics in reference to Fat’s query as to whether the universe might be ruled by an irrational mind. Dr. Stone responds that “The Gnostics believed that the creator deity was insane” and provides Fat with a typescript of an excerpt from the Nag Hammadi text, On the Origin of the World. This excerpt is quoted directly in VALIS as follows:

> He said, 'I am god and no other one exists except me.' But when he said these things, he sinned against all of the immortal (imperishable) ones, and they protected him. Moreover, when Pistis saw the impiety of the chief ruler, she was angry. Without being seen, she said, 'You err, Samael,' i.e. 'the blind god.' 'An enlightened, immortal man exists before you. This will appear within your molded bodies. He will trample upon you like potter's clay, (which) is trampled. And you will go with those who are yours down to your mother, the abyss. (64)

Fat offers a gloss on this passage that places it simultaneously in the context of Gnostic mythology and the philosophical themes of VALIS: "Samael was the creator deity and he imagined that he was the only god, as stated in Genesis. However, he was blind, which is to say, occluded. 'Occluded' was Fat's salient term. It embraced all other terms: insane, mad, irrational, whacked out, fucked up, fried, psychotic" (65). While the Gnostics described the Demiurge as arrogant, ignorant, malevolent, and sometimes mad, Dick makes an artistic choice to highlight insanity as the false creator's primary personality attribute.

The focus on the Demiurge's "occlusion" suggests that Dick's conception of denied freedom is closely related to a context of mental illness, which figures prominently because of his autobiographical struggle with his own mental health and the partially drug-fuelled psychological chaos of 1960's America. As Dick bluntly explains, "This time in America—1960 to 1970—and this place, the Bay Area of Northern California, was totally fucked. [. . .] Fancy terms and ornate theories cannot cover this fact up. The authorities became as psychotic as those they hunted" (12). Dick's

ambiguous use of "the authorities" resembles Pynchon's "They" as well as the Gnostics' use of terms like "ruler" and "authority" to refer alternately or simultaneously to metaphysical and secular authority. As in Invitation to a Beheading, political oppression in VALIS stems from mental occlusion, which in turn may result from a deep-seated metaphysical flaw in the universe. Fat considers that his own institutionalization and perceived persecution by conservative, authoritative representatives of rationality may be only symptomatic of a pervasive metaphysical insanity that inverts or negates the concept of "sanity": "If the whole universe were irrational, because it was directed by an irrational—that is to say, insane—mind, whole species could come into existence, live and perish and never guess" since they had no other standard by which to judge rationality (63).

Fat thus finds himself in a quandary similar to that of Cincinnatus in that both characters are trapped in a nightmarishly grotesque, absurd, and insane world that the majority of those around them regard as normal and rational. Just as Cincinnatus denounces this complacency in illusion by condemning in Gnostic terms "our vaunted waking life" as "semi-sleep, an evil drowsiness," so Dick speculates in an Exegesis entry that the restrictions of the visible and material world may be a nightmare (Invitation 92). Dick writes:

> We are in fact asleep, and in the hands of a dangerous magician disguised as a good god, the deranged creator deity. The bleakness, the evil and pain in this world, the fact that it is a deterministic prison controlled by a demented creator

> causes us willingly to split with the reality principle early in life, and so to speak willingly fall asleep in delusion. (Shifting Realities 332)

As Grossmith notes, Nabokov draws on the Neoplatonic and Gnostic image of the material world and the body as sleep or an unreal dream compared to the higher reality of spirit (55). Dick combines the same concept with a more modern psychoanalytic emphasis on mental illness. The view of the Demiurge as a controlling figure whose occlusion renders the universe irrational and painfully marred recurs throughout VALIS, and Dick consistently identifies this idea as central to his understanding of Gnosticism, as when he states: "a lunatic blind creator and his screwed-up world separate man from God [. . .] This is Gnosticism. In Gnosticism, man belongs with God *against* the world and the creator of the world (both of which are crazy, whether they realize it or not)" (68, italics in original).

The final variant of the Demiurge theme occurs during Fat's conversation with Maurice, whose appalled rejection of Gnostic doctrine in favor of a normative Judaic interpretation of Genesis raises the complex, ambiguous dynamics of occlusion. In a desperate effort to convince Fat that his suicide attempt was ethically reprehensible, Maurice reminds Fat that man was created in the image of God. Fat makes a distinction between the "true God" and the "creator deity," also known as "Yaldaboath [sic]. Sometimes called Samael, the blind god. He's deranged" (86). Fat's further clarification to an incredulous Maurice constitutes a concise explanation of Valentinian Gnostic theology heavily influenced by Hans Jonas:

> Yaldaboath is a monster spawned by Sophia who fell from the Pleroma. [. . .] He imagines he's the only god but he's wrong. There's something the matter with him; he can't see. He creates our world but because he's blind he botches the job. The real God sees down from far above and in his pity sets to work to save us. Fragments of light from the Pleroma are— (86).

Fat's further explanation contextualizes this passage historically and explains the value of these "fragments of light" apprehended through *gnosis*. However, the debate with Maurice highlights the question of freedom by setting up an ambiguity as to who is playing the part of the "occluded" Demiurge: Fat in his supposed possession of an esoteric religious insight or Maurice in his institutionalized condemnation of Fat's madness. This condemnation would be itself irrational and oppressive if the world as a whole were deranged. Fat's two discussions of Gnosticism with two different psychiatrists dramatize the question of freedom, since each of these psychiatrists has control over whether Fat is regarded as sane and hence allowed to move freely in society. Dr. Stone reassures Fat that "you're the authority," thereby "healing" him of self-doubt and lack of intellectual confidence but also potentially confirming him in his insanity (65). Maurice vehemently condemns Fat's heterodoxy and deepens his dilemma regarding conflicting explanations of reality, a conundrum which Dick expresses in the paradox that the Gnostic Fat's "problem, at that moment, was that he knew too much" (87). Fat's study of Gnosticism may have allowed him to appreciate the world's insanity and to seek a higher truth, yet his expression of this esoteric knowledge only confirms his

own insanity from the perspective of the orthodox representatives of officially defined reality.

While Dick uses Gnosticism to depict the complexities of Fat's personal struggle for freedom, VALIS also makes broader use of Gnosticism to dramatize a collective struggle against hegemonic control. For Dick, this struggle manifests itself in the attempts of "early, secret Christians" to blow up the "Black Iron Prison" (47-49).[xiv] The "Black Iron Prison" is a richly multi-faceted image that simultaneously represents the imprisoning cosmos of the Gnostics, the invisible restrictions of ideology, hologramatic Baudrillardian simulacra, and the police state as a Panopticon-like disciplinary apparatus. The Black Iron Prison is also known as "The Empire" in Dick's ominous motif "**The Empire never ended**," which suggests an oppressive hegemonic structure of power that has remained essentially unaltered since the ancient Roman empire (48, boldface in original). However, the efforts of "early, secret Christians" to overthrow this prison suggest that Dick's vision is emancipatory because it partakes of the Gnostic myth as much as poststructuralist theory. While Dick describes the Black Iron Prison as a "supra- or trans-temporal constant" or "Gestalt shared by" multiple "space-time continua," Dick himself regards the struggle to overthrow the prison as equally "trans-temporal": "That made the early, secret Christians supra- or trans-temporal, too, which is to say present at all times" (49).

Dick thus self-consciously regards the Gnostic worldview as a set of representational structures requiring an emancipatory narrative, which can only be revealed through "super-imposition" of multiple eras and geographical areas. Dick's

speculations on the "trans-temporal" status of the Gnostic worldview are influenced partly by the writings of Carl Jung, who expressed a strong affinity with Gnosticism and used it prominently in the formation of his psychoanalytic theories.[xv] This Jungian influence is partially responsible for Dick's vision of revolutionary Christians "in every time," which suggests Jung's formulation of archetypes "in every age and in every time." However, Dick's concept of the Black Iron Prison and those who seek to overthrow it does not depend wholly on Jungian archetypes. Rather, Dick's exploration of this worldview hinges on "superimposition" of various times and spaces, as well as realities both fictional and real. Dick explains:

> if you superimposed the past (ancient Rome) over the present (California in the twentieth century) and super-imposed the far future world of The Android Cried Me a River over that, you got the Empire, the Black Iron Prison, as the supra- or trans- temporal constant. Everyone who had ever lived was literally surrounded by the iron walls of the prison; they were all inside it and none of them knew it—except for the gray-robed secret Christians. [. . .] That made the early secret Christians supra- or trans-temporal, too, which is to say present at all times. (49)

Dick thus suggests that the comparative examination of different narratives, both historical and fictional, can reveal a common denominator or deep structure of revolt against oppression in the name of freedom. As Davis observes, Dick's analysis of a ubiquitous but invisible imprisoning enclosure resembles Foucault's disciplinary apparatus (281). However, both Foucault's theories and Davis' gloss ignore the resolutely emancipatory character of Dick's representations. The prisoners of the Panopticon can

do nothing to change their circumstances because they cannot see the watcher who monitors and controls them, but the Gnostic narrative suggests that some individuals can gain *gnosis* of their confinement, its source, and a more liberating arrangement.

Deconstructive Critique

In order to liberate individuals from oppressive archontic constructions, postmodern adaptations of the Gnostic narrative often draw upon acts of critique that can be modeled as deconstructive operations. These maneuvers constitute a form of skeptical knowledge that reveals the ideological constructedness of oppressive systems and their lack of an immutable ontological basis. One such strategy is the inversion of binary hierarchies in order to privilege the Other, the term that dominant narratives disempower. This strategy can be described as "negative deconstruction" because it "negates" or reverses an existing conceptual structure and reveals the instability of this construction. Pynchon himself models this strategy of reading in his allusions to the Cainite variety of Gnosticism and the fictional "Slothropite" heresy. Gravity's Rainbow offers this further basis for a heretical mode of reading in narratorial reflections on Gerhardt Von Göll's film, Alpdrücken. Pynchon encourages interpretation of his novel within a specifically Gnostic paradigm by having a narrator chide a character for missing Gnostic allusions within the film. The narrator quips, "Pökler in his horny staring had missed the Director's clever Gnostic symbolism in the lighting scheme of the two shadows, Cain's and Abel's" (429). As Margherita Erdman, a recurrent actress in Von Göll's films and the female lead of Alpdrücken further explains, "The light came from above and below at the same time, so that everyone had two shadows: Cain's and Abel's, Gerhardt told us"

(394). On one level, this description alludes generally to the dualistic cosmology of Gnosticism, in which light and dark forces vie for human souls, which are comprised both of matter created by the archons and of spirit infused by the True God. Von Göll's "cleverness" consists partially in his technical ability to consistently create two shadows and in his symbolic depiction of the potential for dark and light as well as domination and victimization that emanates from all of his characters.

Indeed, the narrator suggests that Von Göll's symbolism expresses a truth that has broader thematic ramifications for characters throughout the world of Gravity's Rainbow, many of whom shift unstably between their potential for domination and liberation and their allegiance to "They" or the Counterforce. The narrator explains:

> In the Zone, all will be moving under the Cainists' light and space: not out of any precious Göllerei, but because the Double Light was always there, outside of all film, and that shucking and jiving moviemaker was the only one around at the time to notice it and use it, although in deep ignorance, then and now, of what he was showing the nation of starers. (429)

More specifically, by referring to the "Cainists," the narrator alludes to the various Gnostic sects that engaged in what Jonas calls "the elevation of Cain, prototype of the outcast, condemned by God to be 'a fugitive and a vagabond' on earth, to a pneumatic symbol and an honored position in the line leading to Christ" (95). Jonas cites the Gnostic admirers of Cain, sometime called Cainites, as key practitioners of a "heretical," subversive, and "allegorical" method of reading that works consciously against the grain of received spiritual narratives in order to valorize the figures that are traditionally

demonized. Jonas argues that "in the construction of a complete series of such countertypes, a rebels' view of history as a whole is consciously opposed to the official one" (95).

This heretical mode of reading strongly resembles the "Slothropite" heresy in Gravity's Rainbow, which inverts the theological binary of the "elect" versus the "preterite" by championing the ultimate preterite figure: Judas Iscariot (555-56).[xvi] William Slothrop's goal in valorizing Judas resembles that of the Cainites: to construct a "rebels' view of history" that defends the marginalized and excluded members of society in the name of mercy. "Mercy" enters into this method of reading because of Tyrone Slothrop's musing that if the Slothropite heresy had prevailed, there "might there have been fewer crimes in the name of Jesus, and more mercy in the name of Judas Iscariot" (556). Strictly speaking, "mercy" is an ethical principle valorized by William Slothrop rather than the Gnostics, who tended to subversively privilege ideals of rebellion and freedom rather than compassion. The Slothropite and Cainite heresies do not match in every respect, but rather they both suggest the procedures of a heretical reading strategy that praises a traditionally vilified Other according to a value system that runs contrary to the dominant one. Culiano calls this method "inverse exegesis" because it reverses the intended meaning of a sacred text (124). His adjective "inverse" also suggests a process of "inverting" a hierarchical binary so that the term usually on the bottom is moved to the top, although Culiano does not explain the method in precisely these terms. Even though orthodox opponents of theological Gnosticism often accuse the Gnostics of arrogantly regarding themselves as an elitist "elect," Pynchon chooses to focus on a sect and a

reading strategy that instead connects the Gnostics closely with the Preterite and the Counterforce.

However, as one might expect from a director who prominently alludes to a heresy celebrating Cain as a hero, many of Von Göll's activities are morally shady, including his making of sadomasochistic horror films, his drug use, and his involvement in the black market. Yet, his amorality is subversive of the order of "They" rather than part of a rationalistically oppressive conspiracy. Von Göll associates with the underground that shelters Slothrop and assists him on his quest, including Blodgett Waxwing and the Argentine U-boat revolutionaries. The Bohemians at Der Platz, the commune where Slothrop finally takes refuge, keep a copy of Von Göll's most recent film playing constantly underneath their rug (744-45). When Slothrop criticizes Von Göll's callousness toward the starving peasants attempting to steal from him, Von Göll responds, "Be compassionate. But don't make up fantasies about them. Despise me, exalt them, but remember, we define each other. Elite and preterite, we move through a cosmic design of darkness and light, and in all humility, I am one of the very few who can comprehend it *in toto*" (495). Von Göll's expression of this idea is both arrogantly totalizing and hard-hearted, but his point is subversive: that "elite" and "preterite" are not predestined or immutable categories, but rather mutually constitutive binaries that can shift. This argument is a ruthless variant on William Slothrop's doctrine that there is "holiness for the 'second Sheep,' without whom there would be no elect," about which the narrator comments "you can bet the Elect in Boston were pissed off about that" (555). By depicting Von Göll's amorality, Pynchon demonstrates the insufficiency of negative

deconstruction alone to empower liberation. A director as imaginative, resourceful, and unscrupulous as Von Göll can find ways to subvert the official symbolic and commercial order through his avant-garde films and the black market. However, the instability that negative deconstruction exploits also prevents it from stably asserting a value or meaning, such as William Slothrop's mercy. The narrator also insists that even though Von Göll is the only one to notice the Cainist's light, he does so in "deep ignorance, then and now, of what he was showing the nation of starers" (429). Von Göll's ignorance consists in his lack of awareness that his own symbolism and associated reading strategies of negative deconstruction can be utilized as one of the opening steps in a large interpretative strategy that more genuinely fulfills the Gnostic liberatory ethos. The Counterforce uses negative deconstruction and associated acts of critique to demolish oppressive structures with the greater end of seeking freedom as presence and transcendence.

For example, Osbie Feel seeks to teach Katje Borgesius the metafictional insight that they are living in a novel, thus evoking the poststructuralist emancipatory concept that all oppressive ideologies are socially constructed and therefore changeable (536). Once the Counterforce has been privileged through deconstructive techniques, existing arrangements of power can be deconstructed in order to reveal their fictionality, their status as mere fictional plots. Pynchon represents this stage of reading allegorically when he depicts the formation of the Counterforce as an emancipatory *gnosis* of "reality's" fictionality, an enlightenment similar to the awakening into *gnosis* described by the Valentinian Gospel of Truth. This text encourages the Gnostic seeker to pass beyond

"ignorance" and into the knowledge that the chaos and uncertainty of the material world are mere "empty fictions," ultimately as insubstantial as "disturbing dreams" (Robinson 45). Osbie Feel echoes a secularized version of this Valentinian insight when he brings Katje Borgesius into the Counterforce by sending her a coded film whose message is that "the plot" is not real, with plot referring both to conspiracy and the narrative of Gravity's Rainbow. He also brings her the metafictional *gnosis* that she is a character in a book, as suggested by Louis Mackey's observation that the Counterforce headquarters appears to be Pynchon's workroom and its secret text seems to be Gravity's Rainbow (Mackey xxxiii). Pynchon thus implies that the conspiracies of Control in Gravity's Rainbow can in part be combated by "knowing better" than them, i.e. by recognizing them as fictionalized constructions in the mode of negative deconstruction. However, heretical reading cannot stop at this insight, which is ultimately inadequate to its emancipatory goals. A self-conscious recognition of the constructedness of all value-systems is by itself a weak form of knowledge which cannot function as the impetus for freedom without a more solid foundation.

Cincinnatus also deconstructs the prison world in which he is entrapped through gradually more successful attempts to deny its reality, culminating in an apocalyptic destruction of this world through his refusal to believe in it. His reflections on his own imprisonment lead to the novel's most extended meditation on freedom:

> Standing now in the prison corridor with a sinking heart—still alive, still unimpaired, still Cincinnatic—Cincinnatus C. felt a fierce longing for freedom, the most ordinary, physical, physically feasible kind of freedom, and instantly he

> imagined, with such sensuous clarity as though it was all a fluctuating corona emanating from him, the town below the shallowed river, the town, from every point of which one could see—now in this vista, now in that, now in crayon, now in ink—the tall fortress within which he was. And so powerful and sweet was this tide of freedom that everything seemed better than it really was [. . .]. (72-73)

While Grossmith is certainly right to see an "ideal freedom" granted to Cincinnatus by his imagination, Nabokov thoroughly questions the nature of this freedom (56). Cincinnatus' reflections move subtly through a nuanced spectrum of feelings toward freedom: intense desire, vivid fantasy, actual but temporary possession, and return to the prison. Cincinnatus' free imagination temporarily places him outside of the Panopticon, a position that Foucault's theories would never allow him to assume. Instead of being passively surveyed no matter where he goes, Cincinnatus can actively see "from every point" the disciplinary apparatus in its entirety. He can also deconstructively recognize its artificiality by seeing that it is actually a sketch in "crayon" or "ink" rather than a mass of real stone. This desire for freedom temporarily becomes freedom itself—a "powerful and sweet [. . .] tide of freedom"—but Nabokov suggests that imaginative freedom sustained by deconstruction has its limitations. Cincinnatus's imagination temporarily transports him outside of the cell in an almost magical manner consistent with the overall surrealism of the novel, but at the end of this reverie "the jail was back in force" (75). A deconstructive recognition of the incompleteness of existing ideological power-structures is only temporarily and partially liberating. Deconstruction does not make the realities of

political constraint vanish permanently, and Cincinnatus requires a stronger basis to enable a more permanent freedom.

The final scene of Invitation to a Beheading constitutes Cincinnatus' Gnostic triumph, which conjoins metafiction and metaphysics, deconstruction and revelation. Like Osbie Feel's lessons to Katje Borgesius in Gravity's Rainbow, Cincinnatus' enlightenment involves a growing awareness of the fictionality of the seemingly solid world surrounding him. This awareness increases steadily as he rides in the carriage to his own beheading, noticing first that the wall of his former house has "peeled strangely" and then that the clouds seem to be "all stage-setting" (217-218). Cincinnatus becomes metafictionally aware of the references to incomplete artifice, such as unfinished painting and drama, that Nabokov has used to describe the fictional world of Invitation to a Beheading throughout the novel. Thus, some of the faces in the crowd are "quite badly daubed," in the manner of painted back-drops that will not hold up to intense scrutiny (220). In keeping with De Man's version of deconstruction, which seeks to reveal the rhetorically constructed status of all truth-claims most openly evident in allegory, Cincinnatus recognizes the landscape as a "limp, green, allegorical prospect" (220). This prompts a moment of epiphanic deconstructive *gnosis* that allows him to freely exit the imprisoning story of Invitation to a Beheading and enter a new one:

> with a clarity he had never experienced before—at first almost painful, so suddenly did it come, but then suffusing him with joy, he reflected: why am I here? Why am I lying like this? And, having asked himself these simple questions, he answered them by getting up and looking around. (222)

Cincinnatus literally deconstructs his own world, a hermeneutic process that is physically enacted through a flurry of collapsing artifice: “A spinning wind was picking up and whirling: dust, rags, chips of painted wood, bits of gilded plaster, pasteboard bricks, posters” (223).

Cincinnatus’ final escape and transcendence of the prison world succeeds because his efforts are more radically deconstructionist and assertively reconstructionist than his earlier attempts to imagine his way out. Cincinnatus observes the illusory world around him with greater skeptical scrutiny than before, allowing him to thoroughly recognize its artifice: “as if he did it for the first time, he began looking around” (219). His cognition becomes more effective and clear-minded, and his thoughts begin to break into and overwhelm the third-person description of the setting: “White clouds moved jerkily across the whole sky—I think the same ones pass over and over again, I think there are only three kinds, I think it is all stage-setting” (218). However, the final lines of Invitation to a Beheading suggest that deconstruction is finally insufficient to the goals of emancipation, which require a more reliable knowledge to allow Cincinnatus to act.

Cincinnatus does not merely passively rejoice in the collapse of a dystopian fictional world, or luxuriate in a purely relativist sense of ubiquitous irreality, but instead actively moves toward a real world. Nabokov writes, “amidst the dust, and the falling things, and the flapping scenery, Cincinnatus made his way in that direction where, to judge by the voices, stood beings akin to him” (223). Cincinnatus moves in the direction of reality, perhaps even a transcendent reality, but this is not a mere retreat into a *pleroma*. Rather, in Nabokov’s revision of Gnosticism, Cincinnatus’ retreat is an

immigration to an idealized "double" of the real earth. This world, described as "dreamy, round, and blue" closely resembles "Terra" in Ada, whose existence Van Veen infers based on the dreams of his patients on Anti-Terra (93). Cincinnatus' "there" is also similar to the "comparative paradise" of Nabokov's authorial world that Krug dimly senses from within the pages of Bend Sinister (241).

These intense acts of deconstruction and reconstruction contrast with Cincinnatus' previous attempts to escape the prison through imagination because the first efforts involve an idealized version of the prison world and an attachment to the imprisoning aspects of his dualistically divided self. Thus, during the first attempt at escape, "so powerful and sweet was this tide of freedom that everything seemed better than it really was" (73). Cincinnatus' first imaginative efforts result in a nostalgic yearning for an unrealistically positive version of the illusory prison-world, which distracts him from the *gnosis* of his own authentic self: "even though in reality everything in the city was always quite dead and awful by comparison with the secret life of Cincinnatus and his guilty flame, even though he knew this perfectly well and also that there was no hope, yet at this moment he still longed to be on those bright familiar streets" (75). In order to re-gain his freedom, Cincinnatus must relinquish his attachment to the empty and illusory world as well as those aspects of himself that long for it. One Cincinnatus goes on counting even after the count has become "unnecessary," perhaps because this Cincinnatus has been beheaded.[xvii] The "other Cincinnatus," the pneumatic self alien from the world's illusions and its archontic rulers, declares his ability to act "by himself" and moves toward the real world of "there." At this point in the novel, Nabokov explicitly diverges from

poststructuralist conceptions of freedom and into a stronger definition of it implied throughout the narrative.

Just as in Gravity's Rainbow and Invitation to a Beheading, one aspect of the emancipatory struggle in VALIS involves the deconstructive recognition that the Black Iron Prison is in part an ideologically constructed fiction. Thus, the "secret Christians" can resist the Empire because, unlike the rest of society, they recognize the source of their oppression, as Dick suggests when he writes that human beings "were all inside it and none of them knew it—except for the gray-robed secret Christians" (49). Just as Cincinnatus makes the prison collapse and disappear by refusing to believe in its reality, so Dick describes the "secret Christians scampering away in glee from the Black Iron Prison which they had just succeeded in blowing up" (49). Dick dramatizes this deconstructive demolition even more vividly through Fat's Gnostic reading of Wagner's opera Parsifal, in which Fat draws on Jonas's explication of the "saved savior" concept to explain Parsifal's ability to make the evil magician Klingsor's castle disappear. Parsifal's "purest knowledge" simultaneously heals and frees Amfortas and himself, thereby making him similar to the Gnostic redeemer who, according to Jonas, "is in a sense identical with those he calls" (131). Thus, deconstructive knowledge assists in the destruction of the Black Iron Prison because it raises the question "Is the Empire 'which never ended' an illusion?" (132). As in Pynchon and Nabokov, such knowledge by itself would be inadequate to the goals of emancipation; deconstruction might bring the fortress or the prison toppling down around the prisoner, but it would leave no ability to build up something else.

Dick's speculations on the irreality of the Black Iron Prison contribute to a much larger and more nuanced concern with reality and illusion, which utilizes deconstruction but insists upon emancipatory possibilities of reality or presence that deconstruction does not accommodate. Dick explores the question of reality and irreality most directly in his lecture "How to Build a Universe that Doesn't Fall Apart Two Days Later," in which he reflects that his two main fictional themes are "what is reality?" and "what constitutes the authentic human being?" (260). The lecture deals explicitly with Gnosticism and the Baudrillardian themes of "simulacra" and "simulations," expressed in part through the equally Baudrillardian metaphor of Disneyland. Dick's concern with the confining illusion of the Black Iron Prison mirrors a distrust of illusory realities manufactured by the media, which he compares to the imaginary worlds he creates through science fiction. Dick argues that the question "What is real" acquires urgency because "today we live in a society in which spurious realities are manufactured by the media, by governments, by big corporations, by religious groups, political groups—and the electronic hardware exists by which to deliver these pseudoworlds right into the head of the viewer" (262). Furthermore, Dick argues that "pseudorealities" can potentially supplant actual reality and replace authentic humans with inauthentic subjects who involuntarily replicate false worlds (263). This subsuming of the real by the irreal closely resembles Baudrillard's concept of the "precession of simulacra" and the spread of the "hyperreal" (Simulacra and Simulation 1-7). Baudrillard himself acknowledges this resemblance when he discusses Dick's novels as fictional instantiations of simulations and the hyperreal,

though Baudrillard's theories cause him to reductively ignore Dick's religious concerns (65, 89, 123-24).

Dick goes a step beyond Baudrillard by drawing upon Gnosticism to suggest possibilities of reality that Baudrillard and poststructuralist theory cannot accommodate. According to Dick, human or divine activity could gradually and secretly replace "fake" items with "fake fakes," i.e. real items that could not be immediately recognized as such because most people would not be aware that there was an illusion from the beginning (264). Dick explicitly associates this secret transformation with Gnosticism and suggests "This technically is a Gnostic idea," at which point he makes his central admission of Gnostic affinities: "Gnosticism is a religion that embraced Jews, Christians, and pagans for several centuries. I have been accused of holding Gnostic ideas. I guess I do" (264). Because of Dick's intense interest in classical philosophy, he knows that the concept of the visible world as irreal compared to a higher spiritual reality is as much Platonic and Neoplatonic as Gnostic. Hence, he also discusses Parmenides, Plato, and numerous classical and medieval philosophers to contextualize his reflections on illusion and reality (263-64, 269). However, he specifically associates the deliberate, malevolent manufacturing of irreal worlds with the Gnostic Demiurge, as suggested by an anecdote in which he encounters an allusion to "a Gnostic codex called The Unreal God and the Aspects of His Nonexistent Universe, an idea that reduced me to helpless laughter" (264). Dick's laughter expresses the inherent humor of devoting intense study to non-existent worlds, but he also suggests in his lecture that contemplation of the irreal can lead to the possibility of the real. Dick implies that for the concept of an illusion to be coherent, it

must be irreal compared to something else: the real and perhaps even the transcendentally real. Moreover, the presence of the real might be fostered through a combination of transcendent intervention and human rebellion, which Dick imagines as undertaken by countercultural pranksters similar to Pynchon's Counterforce: "Suppose some night all of us sneaked into the park with real birds and substituted them for the artificial ones" (264). The possibility of freedom as presence and transcendence is one reason that the early, secret Christians are described as experiencing "joy" at the destruction of the prison, rather than the anarchic confusion of nihilism (48).

---

[i] Although Gnosticism is not as directly associated with interpretation as other text-oriented mystical systems, such as the kabbala, the Gnostics nevertheless practiced acts of creative, heretical interpretation that ran contrary to the dominant symbol-systems of their time. Several scholars have noted the importance of interpretation to Gnostic doctrine, although these critics tend to identify Gnosticism too closely with deconstruction and thus cannot account for the generative possibilities of the *gnosis* of transcendent presence. Jonas suggests the concept of a "heretical method" of reading in his account of the "Gnostic allegory" practiced by the Cainite sect, who deliberately read against the conscious intention of scriptural writers in order to valorize the demonized Other (95). Inspired by Jonas, Bloom argues that Gnosticism was "the inaugural and most powerful of Deconstructions," and Culiano labels the "main hermeneutical principle of the gnostics" as "inverse exegesis" (Agon 152, Culiano 121).

[ii] Heretical reading thus positions itself in a tradition that is structurally analogous (though ideologically opposed) to Paul De Man's approach in his discussions of allegory and symbol in "The Rhetoric of Temporality." De Man treats three separate entities as components of a single universe of discourse: Romanticist poetry, statements of intentionality by Romantic poets, and critics struggling to find the authentic voice of Romanticism.

[iii] The Gnostics abhorred the desire for power over other human beings, and their spiritual doctrine was intended as a guide for evading and eventually defeating the demonic forces of oppression. Because Control occupies an analogous position to the archons in the Gnostic cosmos, Eddins's association of Control with "gnosticizing cults" themselves is misleading and inaccurate (130). These inaccuracies remain despite his attempts to evade this objection through discussions of a dialectical "conceptual slippage" between oppressor and oppressed (95). Eddins' errors stem ultimately from his excessive reliance on Eric Voegelin's version of political gnosticism (which Eddins references pervasively), as opposed to the actual texts of the religious Gnostics or contemporary commentaries on them (which he very rarely, if ever, cites).

[iv] Davydov's volume is only available in Russian, so I am currently unable to benefit from his analysis. Alexandrov cites pages 100-82 as the relevant sections, as does Johnson (84, 5).

[v] Johnson also titles one of his chapters "Nabokov as Gnostic Seeker," implying that the intersection between metaphysics and metafiction in Nabokov's thought can be productively understood under the rubric of "Gnostic" (185-223). This chapter avoids the specifics of Gnostic mythology and uses the term to mean individual, experiential, and mystical "seeking" rather than adherence to a fixed body of doctrine. While this usage blurs the line somewhat between Gnosticism *per se* and mysticism in general, Pagels

argues that tendencies toward individual, mystical searching are characteristic of the Gnostics and highlights these aspects of the Nag Hammadi texts (119-41).

[vi] In Divine Invasions, Sutin discusses Dick's discovery of Gnosticism and its influence on this novel (128).

[vii] Richard Smith, the managing editor of The Nag Hammadi Library, examines Gnostic elements in VALIS in "The Modern Relevance of Gnosticism," his afterword to the Nag Hammadi texts (546-47). Sutin discusses the importance of Gnosticism to VALIS in his introduction to The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick, and he analyzes Gnostic influence on Dick's thought and work throughout Divine Invasions, his biography of Dick (Shifting Realities xxiii, xxviii-xxix note 8; Divine Invasions 24, 49, 128, 133). Sutin emphasizes the creatively generative character of Dick's interest in Gnosticism rather than rigidly dogmatic belief in it (128). Robert Galbreath also examines Dick's use of Gnosticism in "Salvation-Knowledge: Ironic Gnosticism in VALIS and The Flight to Lucifer," which argues that Dick's references to Gnosticism are predominantly ironic because they frequently call into question the validity and salvational efficacy of Fat's metaphysical "knowledge." In Philip K Dick, Douglas Mackey also discusses the role of Gnosticism in VALIS and counters Galbreath by arguing that all Gnosticism "is inherently ironic" because "it doubts everything" (120). In addition, Mackey discusses the influence of Gnosticism on Dick's thought and several other novels, and he places this influence within a broader literary context in "Science Fiction and Gnosticism." In "Gnosticism and Dualism in the Early Fiction of Philip K. Dick" and "Redemption in Philip K. Dick's The Man in the High Castle," Lorenzo DiTommaso extends the explanatory value of Gnosticism beyond VALIS and The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch and into Dick's fiction of the late fifties and early sixties. The understanding of Dick as a "Gnostic" writer has also entered middlebrow and popular journalism, albeit sometimes in a slightly hyperbolic or simplified form. "The Lost Gospels," a recent TIME article by David Van Biema, states that Dick "specialized in dual-world scenarios reminiscent of ancient Gnosticism, and in 1974 he had what he deemed a Gnostic epiphany" (57). The "Philip K. Dick" web page at The Modern Word, an excellent online twentieth century literature resource, describes Dick as "a Gnostic thinker who doubted the reality of the world around him" and asserts that Gnosticism "would eventually dominate [Dick's] life."

[viii] In his preface to The Nag Hammadi Library, Smith gives the publication information for the first edition of the Nag Hammadi texts, as well as a bibliographic history of these texts (ix-xii). In "The Modern Relevance of Gnosticism," he identifies the source of Dick's quotations from On the Origin of the World as the 1977 first edition of The Nag Hammadi Library (546).

[ix] For example, Derrida equates the concept of a "present origin" with "*arche*" in "Différance" (396). Deconstruction constitutes a "systematic crossing-out of the *arche* and the transformation of general semiology into a grammatology, the latter performing a critical work upon everything within semiology—right down to its metrical concept of signs—that retains any metaphysical presuppositions incompatible with the theme of differance" (396).

[x] The Cathars were a heretical medieval sect whose ideas Culiano has identified as being structurally analogous to the Gnostics (214-38). As Weisenburger notes in his gloss on this passage, Pynchon could have acquired the Cathar interpretation of this card, along with its violent opposition toward the Catholic church, from A.E. Waite's introduction to The Pictorial Key to the Tarot (310).

[xi] Grossmith convincingly links the motif of bodily "divestment" to Gnosticism and Neoplatonism via Jonas and Plotinus (57-58).

[xii] In The Naked Lunch, William S. Burroughs offers a similar spatial axiom conveying the difficulties of transcendence and escape from control when he writes, "The way OUT is the way IN" (208, capitals in original). Gregory Stephenson points out many Gnostic aspects of Burroughs' fictional universe in "The Gnostic Vision of William S. Burroughs."

[xiii] The shining, shifting architecture of the "Rocket-State" is another structure with similar allegorical implications about the difficulties of a search for freedom. The narrator observes that "travel here gets complicated" because the buildings shift along right angles as well as rising and lowering along vertical levels (674). The narrator also compares movement among this arrangement of buildings to a game of chess, since only certain paths along the grid are available to Slothrop as he avoids his father's attacks and searches for goals that also change. The image of freedom as an intricate and challenging game involving

navigation through labyrinthine spaces will recur in the final chapter of this dissertation, on literary pedagogy and game design.

[xiv] Although Dick does not use the phrase "Gnostic" in this particular passage, he carefully distinguishes the "secret Christians" from the orthodox mainstream when he describes "an organization of Christians, not regular Christians such as those who attended church every Sunday and prayed, but secret early Christians wearing light gray-colored robes" (48). This emphasis on secrecy, rebellion, and separation from orthodoxy suggests Dick's positive representations of heretical resistance, in keeping with his understanding of Gnosticism as a heresy. For Dick, ancient Christianity and Gnosticism were not absolutely separate; he identifies the "real, secret Christian church" with the Gnostics in his "ten major principles of the gnostic revelation" (332). Dick's distinction of Gnostic "secret Christians" from mainline, modern, church-going ones may stem partly from his sometimes negative encounters with the Episcopalian church, which he briefly joined in the early sixties in response to a "spiritual crisis" described by Sutin (126). Dick's distinction between authentic heresy and oppressive orthodoxy also originates in an awareness that inauthentic claims to transcendent presence can oppress politically and prevent actual, spontaneous spiritual experience. One such oppressive orthodoxy is the "Christian-Islamic Church" of The Divine Invasion, whose archontic, techno-political representatives perceive the actual arrival of divine presence as a threatening "invasion" (79-80). Moreover, Sutin notes that Dick's visions of the Black Iron Prison involved the superimposition of Rome around the first century A.D., which Sutin describes as "the peak of Gnostic activity" (211).

[xv] In Divine Invasions, Sutin explains that Dick discovered the Gnostics partly through an essay by Jung entitled "Transformation Symbolism in the Mass" (128). Smith summarizes Jung's psychoanalytical revision of Gnosticism as a model for the structure of the self, both conscious and unconscious (538-41).

[xvi] Indeed, Culiano observes that the Cainites also valorized Judas Iscariot and looked upon "Cain and Judas as . . . the only true representatives of the Pleroma, those who plant the seed of gnostic revolution into a world dominated by the laws of the evil demiurge" (125). The Slothropite heresy may thus originate partially from Thomas Pynchon's familiarity with the Cainites in addition to his perusal of what Mackey describes as William Pynchon's much milder, relatively "uncontroversial" heresy (xxxi).

[xvii] Toker explores the ambiguities of this final scene in detail, highlighting the uncertainty as to whether and what point Cincinnatus is beheaded (136-39).

Chapter Two: Freedom as Question and Process

Freedom as Presence and Transcendence

While Gnosticism and postmodern fiction share with emancipatory versions of poststructuralism an ambition to liberate through deconstructive critique, postmodern fiction and Gnosticism diverge from poststructuralism in their conceptualization of freedom. Postmodern fiction read through the Gnostics allows freedom to be conceived of as presence and transcendence, two theoretical concepts that are severely critiqued by poststructuralist theories of the postmodern condition. Because of the extreme conceptual complexity and abstraction of presence and transcendence, as well as the multiple ways that theorists use and critique the terms, they must be carefully defined. "Presence" refers to that which is real in an ontological sense and available as a direct, unmediated experience of being. "Transcendence" refers to a condition beyond the created world, above and independent of both material existence and arbitrary human constructions of society and language. Within this general definition, there are two possible senses of the word. One involves the location of transcendence outside of the material world, in another spiritual or psychological realm. By being elevated to this realm, one can "transcend" the problems and constraints of ordinary, everyday existence. The other meaning of transcendence refers not so much to rising above the created world but to the location in the world of objects, values, and experiences that are independent of human constructions. Derrida critiques this definition of "transcendence" when he

proclaims the "absence of the transcendental signified," meaning a real external referent or thing-in-itself which signifiers can denote (Of Grammatology 50). These two versions of transcendence are often complexly interrelated, but one can be summarized as a condition elevated from the world, while the other refers to existence firmly, ontologically grounded in it.

Postmodern versions of poststructuralist theory forbid presence and both types of transcendence equally. Many postmodern versions of poststructuralism suggest that human beings can never experience or directly express presence because of the inevitable mediation of difference and absence. Difference—punningly referred to by Derrida as différance—means that words are always already endlessly deferred in time or different in space from things. As Derrida explains in "Différance," "the signified concept is never present in itself, in an adequate presence that would refer only to itself. Every concept is necessarily and essentially inscribed in a chain or system within which it refers to another and to other concepts, by the systematic play of differences" (392). Words are separated from things by an infinitely regressive chain of signifiers, each intended to make up for a lack, an absent origin or "transcendental signified" whose non-existence must be compensated for by a series of supplements (Of Grammatology 50). Deconstructionist theorists claim that unmediated experiences of presence are equally impossible, since these experiences are "always already" shaped by writing, so that even the direct "voice" of consciousness is separated from itself by a gap of différance. For Derrida, différance necessitates the deconstruction of "consciousness" and "all forms of subjective existence" as "self-presence, a self-perception of presence" (396-97).

Deconstruction also constitutes an ambition to radically question an entire epoch of logocentric Western "onto-theological" metaphysics that ultimately presupposes an experience of presence. Derrida announces this ambition in Of Grammatology, in which he proclaims that "rationality" "inaugurates destruction, not the demolition, but the de-sedimentation, the de-construction, of all the significations that have their source in that of the logos" (101). He equates this ambition with "the destruction of onto-theology and the metaphysics of presence" (50). Derrida argues "that the epoch of the logos" can be characterized by belief in "the meaning of being in general as presence," including all the various sub-categories of presence that he deconstructs:

> presence of the thing to the sight as *eidos*, presence as substance/essence/existence [*ouisa*], temporal presence as point [*stigmè*] of the now or of the moment [*nun*], the self-presence of the cogito, consciousness, subjectivity, the co-presence of the other and of the self, intersubjectivity as the intentional phenomenon of the ego. (12)

While Derrida conceives of deconstruction as an attack on the metaphysics of presence, he does not advocate a purely negative embrace of absence. Rather, he affirms the "trace," a third term that is neither presence nor absence but rather a "presence-absence" (71). Deconstruction argues that linguistic systems are composed of binary pairs consisting of a privileged term and its subordinated "other" or "supplement." Derrida suggests that the privileged term always contains an ineradicable "trace" of the other. Because the elements of linguistic systems are constituted by difference, this trace is actually required in order for the privileged concept to signify. As Derrida explains, "The

'unmotivatedness' of the sign requires a synthesis in which the completely other is announced as such—without any simplicity, any identity, any resemblance or continuity—within what is not it" (47). This means that for a privileged concept such as "speech" to function linguistically, it must contain a trace of "writing" or the "completely other." Most importantly, the privileged concept of direct, unmediated "speech," which the history of Western metaphysics has sought to valorize over writing, must always contain traces of writing which precede it and constitute it. Derrida objects to Western metaphysics because of its tendency to "sublimate" or "reduce" the trace through the religious and philosophical concept of presence. He regards all Western religious and secular philosophical systems as attempts to deny the trace by absolutist theories of presence, which must be progressively more extreme in their valorization of a privileged metaphysical term and their debasement of its supplement. Derrida writes that "all dualisms, all theories of the immortality of the soul or of the spirit, as well as all monisms, spiritualist or materialist, dialectical or vulgar, are the unique theme of a metaphysics whose entire history was compelled to strive toward the reduction of the trace" (71). In particular, Derrida sees religious thinking as a radical effort to eradicate the trace of finitude and death through the invocation of the infinite concept of God as embodied in his holy speech or "logos." Derrida asserts a close relationship between Western religious thought and the attempt to deny the trace when he insists that "the logos as the sublimation of the trace is *theological*" rather than only incidentally related to theology (71, italics in original).

Derrida and many Derridaean deconstructionists regard this version of deconstruction as affirmative because it celebrates middle terms that exceed the binary divisions of presence and absence, writing and speech. However, this claim to affirmation remains dubious because Derrida frequently critiques the metaphysics of presence but rarely argues against an abandonment to absence in the form of nihilism. In practice, Derrida consistently deconstructs claims to presence and transcendence by seeking traces of absence and finitude, but he rarely reads for traces of presence. When critics apply Derrida's theories as methods of reading to postmodern fiction, these theories operate negatively and confiningly. Alec McHoul and David Wills, in *Writing Pynchon*, exemplify the reductive and negative use of deconstruction under the guise of "affirmation." They authorize their approach to Pynchon primarily through Derrida, and they proclaim the superiority of their readings because they supposedly evade binaries and celebrate third terms derived from Derrida (2, 58). While Derrida denies that his version of deconstruction negates reality or meaning, McHoul and Wills use his critique of presence as grounds to attack any critic who affirms any aspect of the world as real, true, or valuable. For example, McHoul and Wills view their strategy of reading as superior to humanist or realist Pynchon criticism because their readings acknowledge the text's " status as game, design, practice, play, inscription or diagram rather than, say, its status as representation of some confused—but really existing—universe" (51). They condescendingly mock as naïve any critic who implies the existence of a real world or an actual author. In the name of "contemporary literary theory" exemplified by Derrida and Barthes, they condemn all Pynchon criticism that seeks reality and meaning.

Summarizing what they regard as outmoded and pernicious "realist" and "humanist" Pynchon scholarship, McHoul and Wills write:

> And while we may often despair of making sense of these texts individually, let alone collectively, what appears to give them some sort of continuity—if anything—is their relatively constant faith in what might be called 'living presence', in the guises of history, science, myth, nature and so on, combined with an equally touching faith in the idea that someone, an actually existing person, an author, collects this presence together into fictional representations such that the critic's job is, as it were, the de-collecting of the same items, the recuperation of them 'from the novel' and 'back into (our) presence'. The ontology (theory of Being) is realist—and so is the implicit aesthetics that here passes for literary theory. (4)

Rather than providing evidence to support their critique of presence and transcendence, McHoul and Wills reject any argument that draws upon these concepts by implying that it is not actually "literary theory." Their association of evidence "collection" with forbidden realist modes of interpretation prevents them from having to collect any to support their own position. As they explain of their own procedures, "Telegrammatology transforms any text into a telegram by refusing to select, quote, cite or iterate according to a metaphysics of presence. Instead, it cuts the text into telegrammatic snippets—beginnings, ends, errors—whatever *puncta* may arise" (125). Drawing upon Ulmer's "applied grammatology" or "telegrammatology," they claim to randomly "cut" fragments of text to which they apply various forms of linguistic play such as punning and analysis

of punctuation (125). They do not "interpret" Pynchon's novels in order to seek meaningful implications about presence or transcendence—concepts whose validity they deny in the name of Derrida.

Heretical reading suggests this critique of presence and transcendence itself constitutes a reductive, hegemonic, totalizing meta-narrative that cannot adequately account for the richness of postmodern fiction. While Derrida claims that "the science of writing [. . .] shows signs of liberation all over the world" and allows a "liberation of the signifier," wholly poststructuralist approaches to postmodern fiction both confine the imaginations of author and reader and overlook the generative potential of intimations of presence for liberating narratives and narratives of liberation (Of Grammatology 4, 19). Postmodern transformations of Gnosticism do not contest the general background of indeterminacy and absence presupposed by poststructuralist theory, but they do suggest the possibility of fragmentary, non-totalizing intimations of transcendence and presence. Moreover, postmodern fiction represents possibilities of conjoining the two outlawed concepts of "presence" and "transcendence" in "transcendent presence." "Transcendent presence" describes the experience not only of the real, but of the transcendentally real—the real beyond any human construction or ideology.

In other words, postmodern fiction instantiates moments of religious experience involving intimations of divinity and the sacred, intimations that are fragmentary, tentative, and difficult to express but nonetheless possible. This is the most useful analogy between the Gnostic worldview and the novels of Pynchon, Nabokov, and Dick. Like postmodern authors, the Gnostics saw the cosmos as a void of darkness and

hegemonic control, but they nonetheless believed that fragments of divinity, called the "*pneuma*" (spirit) or "the spark" are dispersed throughout the created world. These pneumatic sparks are located in the innermost core of human beings, distinct from both the mind ("*psyche"*) and the body. As Jonas explains, "enclosed in the soul is the spirit, or 'pneuma,' (called also the 'spark'), a portion of the divine substance from beyond which has fallen into the world" (44). Jonas describes the *pneuma* through the Gnostic trope of dispersal, of which he writes, "If portions of the Light or the first Life have been separated from it and mixed in with the darkness, then an original unity has been split up and given over to plurality: the splinters are the sparks dispersed throughout the creation." Later stages of cosmic development result in the "indefinite further dispersion of the particles of light which the powers of darkness have succeeded in engulfing" (59).

Postmodern adaptations of Gnosticism draw on the trope of dispersed sparks to suggest non-totalizing intimations of transcendent presence. Gnosticism provides a way to model these intimations in an anti-reductive manner that can benefit from poststructuralist insights without silencing or excluding possibilities of presence. Like the pneumatic sparks, these enclaves are scattered through a background of noise, waste, entropic disintegration, and simulacral replication. The images used to represent these sparks of presence in all three authors consistently emphasize luminosity and dispersion. Pynchon, Nabokov, and Dick often use the image of the spark directly, as well as related tropes for fragments of light in a world of darkness, including shards, jewels, pockets, and enclaves. Pynchon invokes the "meanest sharp sliver of truth" hidden among entropic "waste" and simulacral "replication," and Oedipa Maas imagines "gemlike

'clues'" that may be "only some compensation" for "having lost the direct, epileptic Word, the cry that might abolish the night" (Gravity's Rainbow 590, The Crying of Lot 49 118). She directly identifies these clues with intimations of the transcendent when she wonders if at the end of her quest "she too might not be left with only compiled memories of clues, announcements, intimations, but never the central truth itself" (95). Oedipa experiences the loss of a "central truth" as a lack, yet her quest is largely driven by a fascination with the intimations and clues left over from this loss. Similarly, Cincinnatus conceives of his *gnosis* as the awareness of an immutable selfhood associated with a "final, indivisible, firm, radiant point," which he also imagines as a "pearl," imagery derived in part from the Gnostic "Hymn of the Pearl."[xviii] Cincinnatus also celebrates the imaginative faculty shared by him and his mother as an "ultimate, secure, all-explaining, and from-all-protecting spark" (136). Nabokov often associates privileged moments of aesthetic perception with jewels, whose compact luminosity precisely emblematizes the non-totalizing character of the sparks of presence. Images of jewels are scattered through Speak, Memory as a crucial recurrent motif that Nabokov draws attention to in the index, along with cross-referenced images of "stained glass" in a "pavilion" (313). While describing Valentinian Gnostic theology, Horselover Fat attempts to explain to Maurice that "Fragments of light from the Pleroma are—" and is interrupted, so that his attempt to explain the pneumatic spark is itself a luminous fragment without its full context (86). In the final pages of VALIS, Dick expresses a similar dispersed fragmentation of the sacred in the form of an aphorism: "the symbols of the divine show up initially in our world at the trash stratum" (228).

Unlike Derrida's "trace," a spark is an intimation of transcendence and presence, whereas the trace is an instantiation of différance. This distinction is important because Derrida himself acknowledges that aspects of his language have religious overtones, especially in their close similarity to the tradition of "negative theology." Negative theologians deny all of the entities that God is not and all of the qualities that he does not possess, with the eventual aim of attaining the experience or knowledge of God that exceeds these qualities. Derrida explains in his essay "Différance" that différance is not the God of negative theology, even if the "detours, locutions, and syntax" that he uses resembles the linguistic strategies of this tradition (6).[xix] Derrida's language resembles that of negative theology because he draws upon complex, often paradoxical maneuvers of negation to deny all of the concepts that différance resembles but is finally not synonymous with. Deconstruction differs from negative theology because deconstruction's denials do not indirectly affirm a divine presence but instead perpetually explore the play of the trace as différance. Derrida himself insists upon this distinction between negative theology and deconstruction when he writes that "those aspects of *différance* which are thereby delineated are not theological, not even in the order of the most negative of negative theologies, which are always concerned with disengaging a superessentiality that is beyond the finite categories of essence and existence, that is of presence" (6). While Derrida regards the play of the trace as inherently affirmative, this quotation suggests that in practice his deconstruction can easily become more negative than "the most negative of negative theologies." Without a tolerance or acknowledgment of possibilities of presence, the play of the trace tends to become non-committal

vacillation and a refusal to adopt an interpretative thesis, as in the work of self-proclaimed Derridaeans McHoul and Wills. In contrast to the trace, a spark is an intimation of presence and transcendence that nevertheless differs from the Platonic realm of absolutes or the Gnostic pleroma because it is fragmentary and partial.

Spark-like intimations of presence occur throughout Pynchon's fictions, often experienced by characters as "illuminations" associated with the heightened cognition of information. Oedipa Maas's "odd religious instant" and "promise of hierophany" provide the paradigmatic case of this process, but the experience of presence also recurs throughout Gravity's Rainbow (The Crying of Lot 49 24, 31). Pynchon summarizes these dispersed intimations as "all the presences we are not supposed to be seeing—wind gods, hilltop gods, sunset gods—that we train ourselves away from to keep from looking further even though enough of us do" (720).[xx] Presumably, "we are not supposed to be seeing" these presences in the world because modern science has explained them away as superstitions, and readers are not supposed to find them in literature because postmodern versions of poststructuralism have deconstructed them as allegories of unattainable human desire. Nevertheless, enough critics do see such presences throughout Pynchon's work.[xxi] These critics are justified by Pynchon's frequent, vivid evocations of "presence" and "presences" in Gravity's Rainbow. While at the Casino Herman Goering, Slothrop repeatedly experiences intimations of presence, often menacing but also demonically numinous, including "an order whose presence among the ordinary debris of waking life he has only lately begun to suspect," "the Presence feared and wanted," and "some Presence so large nobody else can see it" (202-03). All these intimations of presence can

also be regarded as moments of paranoia, but Pynchon reminds the reader that "there is something comforting, religious if you want, about paranoia" (434). In Gravity's Rainbow, paranoia may not always be entirely pathological, but may also be a heightened form of cognition and insight— a "reflex of seeking other orders behind the visible" (188).

Dick develops the Gnostic spark imagery throughout his oeuvre in order to describe the luminosity of visionary experience while at the same time acknowledging its fragmentation and intrusion into a world of indeterminacy. The paradigmatic case of this *gnosis* of the pneumatic spark is Horselover Fat's experience of the "beam of pink light" which imparts possibly salvational information to him (20). This description is based upon Dick's own 2-3-74 experiences, whose ambiguous meaning or lack thereof he obsessively pondered throughout the last years of his life and explored in several of his fictions. Thus, in A Scanner, Darkly, Donna describes an acquaintance who "saw God" in an episode closely modeled off of Dick's 2-3-74 experience. This character perceives divinity as "sparks. Showers of colored sparks [. . .] sparks going up the wall, sparks in the air" (184). The Divine Invasion associates the location of the sparks with a process of reading, modeled in a computerized, hypertextual, hologramatic version of the Torah (69-70). Although the primary source for this process of exegesis is the kabbalah, the character Elias explains the kabbalistic discernment of divine textual presence in terms of the Gnostic sparks:

> this was the concealed primordial light of Creation itself [. . .] wrapped up in the heart of the Torah. This was an inexhaustible light, related to the divine sparks

> which the Gnostics had believed in, the fragments of the Godhead which were now scattered throughout Creation. (98)

Like Pynchon, Dick also sometimes invokes the word "presence" to describe these intimations of the numinous, as when Bill Lunsford elaborates on his spiritual communion with the reincarnated Timothy Archer, "It's a presence of mind. See, Tim was in that area—the word 'presence' reminded me; he uses that word a lot. The Presence, as he calls it, was there in the desert" (The Transmigration of Timothy Archer 234). In the conclusion of Dick's final novel, he thus suggests that even in the desert of the postmodern condition, possibilities of presence still remain.

Pynchon and Dick both theorize the *gnosis* of presence and transcendence through the closely related terms "theophany" and "hierophany," both of which derive from Mircea Eliade's The Sacred and the Profane. Thus, Oedipa experiences "the promise of hierophany" while looking at a map of Inverarity's estate, which reminds her of a Southern California suburb viewed from above that in turn suggests a circuitboard (31). Similarly, Dick explains Horselover Fat's experience of the divine in VALIS by observing that "the technical term—theological technical term, not psychiatric—is theophany. A theophany consists of a self-disclosure by the divine" (37). He further explains that "a theophany is an in-breaking of God, an in-breaking which amounts to an invasion of our world" (39). Dick thus echoes Jesús Arrabal's definition of a "miracle" as "another world's intrusion into this one," a phrase that Oedipa considers later in the novel (120, 124). "Hierophany" and "theophany" are closely related etymologically, since both contain the Greek root "—phany," meaning "appearance" or "manifestation"

(OED Online). "Hierophany" combines the idea of "manifestation" with the prefix "hiero—," meaning "sacred" or "holy" (OED Online). Similarly, "theophany" conjoins the concept of "manifestation" with the root for "god," so that one word suggests a "manifestation of the sacred" while the other denotes "a manifestation of god." Mircea Eliade uses the two terms interchangeably in The Sacred and the Profane to refer to "the act of manifestation of the sacred" (11, 27). In "The Sacred, the Profane, and The Crying of Lot 49," Mendelson documents Eliade's influence on the book by tracing the coining and usage of the term in Patterns in Comparative Religion and The Sacred and the Profane (122). Similarly, Dick directly cites Eliade's Myth and Reality in VALIS and has the character Kevin explain Eliadean ideas of sacred time (41, 46-47).

Pynchon and Dick's primary emphasis on the spatial "intrusion" of the sacred echoes Eliade's definition of the "hierophany" as "an irruption of sacred space" and the "manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world" (26, 11). This definition of "hierophany" also resembles Jonas's concept of the Gnostic "call from without," in which a salvational message from the alien God "penetrates" the archontic cosmos and awakens the seeker into *gnosis* (74-75). This concept, derived primarily from Mandaean and Manichaean texts rather than Nag Hammadi ones, plays a central role in Jonas's version of Gnosticism and provides the book's subtitle, "The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity." The focus on the entrance of the transcendent into the world occurs partly because all three authors were either influenced by Jonas or accounts of Gnosticism contemporary with him, mediated through an Eliadean version of religious studies.

Jean Luc-Nancy, a theorist and student of Derrida, explores similar possibilities of non-totalizing presence in The Birth to Presence. Nancy writes:

> Here, this is clearly a thinking of 'presence.' Not the firmly standing presence, immobile and impassive of a platonic Idea. But presence as a to-be-here, or to-be-there, as a come-to-here, or there, of somebody. Some *body*: an existence, a being in the world, being given to the world. No more, no less, than *everybody*, everyday, everywhere. No more, no less, than the *finitude* of this existence, which means: the matter of fact that it does not have its sense in any Idea (in any achievement of "sense"), but does have it in being exposed to this presence that comes, and only comes (ix).

Nancy thus distinguishes between a Platonic conception of presence as an infinite, foundational Idea and a finite presence that is always in the process of being born or "coming." Nancy's idea that presence is not the stable foundation of a Platonic Idea resembles the distinction between a fragmentary spark and a *pleroma* of complete plentitude. His idea that presence is "always coming" also resembles Eliade's description of a hierophany as the intrusion from another world into this one, yet Nancy's presence is this-worldly and secular rather than mystical. Nancy's version of presence is always coming, but it is both born from and into this world, as suggested by the phrase "no more, no less, than the *finitude* of this existence" (ix, italics in original). In contrast, the hierophanic moments described in postmodern fiction enter this world from outside of it, intimating transcendence even when the transcendent realm is unavailable as a route of

escape out of the world. These intimations of presence are perceived through a liberating *gnosis* that heretical reading embraces instead of rejecting.

By modeling the Gnostic spark as a hierophanic intrusion into the world rather than a retreat into the *pleroma*, Pynchon, Dick, and Nabokov make presence amenable to the enabling of collective political struggles for freedom. Although Pynchon, Dick, and Nabokov do suggest possibilities of metaphysical intimations of presence, they represent the transcendent realm as non-totalizing. Except in the conclusion of Invitation to a Beheading, this realm is unavailable as a location for retreat from the material and social world. Even in this novel, the possibility remains that Cincinnatus' escape may be a delusion, coming perhaps at the moment of his execution, as in the conclusion of Terry Gilliam's film Brazil. Bloom's method of reading is unable to account for the intrusive, tentative, and fragmentary character of numinous intimations in Pynchon because Bloom seems to desire a fully Romanticist or Transcendentalist version of *gnosis* that Pynchon is simply not willing to deliver. Thus, Bloom laments that "Pynchon's is a Gnosis without transcendence. There is a Counterforce, but there is no fathering and mothering abyss to which it can return" ("Introduction" 3). In historical Gnosticism, the Gnostic initiate's ultimate goal was escape from the *kenoma* into the *pleroma*—the "abyss" to which Bloom refers—where the soul could dwell in eternal plenitude. Gnosticism (and Lurianic kabbalah, the branch of kabbalah with the closest affinity to Gnosticism), represents the escape of the *pneuma* into the primordial, peaceful unity of the *pleroma* as the "gathering of the sparks" (Jonas 45-46). Pynchon parodies this return to transcendent unity viciously at multiple points in Gravity's Rainbow, including not just the Byron the Bulb

episode but also the Central Nervous System section and a passage describing trash collection as the return of the contents of the vessels back to their central source.[xxii]

Instead of a nostalgic yearning for retreat into totalizing plenitude, both Dick and Pynchon focus primarily on Eliade's spatial version of hierophany as an "irruption" or "breakage" of the sacred from one ontological realm into another (Eliade 21, 26). These similar spatial conceptions of revelation depend upon a dualistic metaphysical cosmology underlying the fictions of all three authors. Each author posits a material world of everyday events and a secondary, spiritual realm from which intimations of the numinous can flow. Pynchon calls this secondary realm "the Other Side," and Kathryn Hume's book Pynchon's Mythography thoroughly maps this region and its role in Gravity's Rainbow (46, 51-52). Although Nabokov sometimes claims to eschew dualism in favor of monistic conceptions of the universe, he constructs Invitation to a Beheading on a dualistic, quasi-Platonic or Neo-Platonic framework that opposes a "here" of oppressive imprisonment and torment to a "there" of freedom and beauty (93-94).[xxiii] Whereas the existence of these two worlds tends to be suggested or intimated rather than stated directly in Nabokov and Pynchon, Dick explicitly depicts such a dualistic division of the universe in Fat's "Two Source Cosmogony." This self-devised myth describes the two worlds as "Hyperuniverse II"—the origin of the Black Iron Prison and the Empire—and "Hyperuniverse I"—a realm of light and health that attempts to repair the defects of "Hyperuniverse II" (91-93). Like Nabokov's "Here," Hyperuniverse II is an oppressive prison, a realm of "**blind, mechanical, purposeless causal processes**" (92, boldface in original).[xxiv] In contrast, "Hyperuniverse I" gives rise to the "living information" which

can liberate through *gnosis*. While Fat envisions the entire universe as a "teaching machine" designed to convey a liberating cosmic pedagogy, Hyperuniverse II interferes with this goal through the classic information theory contamination of signal by noise. Dick writes, "**the teaching function was grossly impaired, since only the signal from the hyperuniverse I was information-rich; that from II had become noise**" (92).

While these dualistic cosmologies resemble the rigid Platonic binaries that postmodern theory has labored to deconstruct, all three authors complicate this dualism through a transformed concept of hierophany and thus of *gnosis*. Pynchon, Nabokov, and Dick make use of a Gnostic cosmology in their fictions because Gnosticism allows for possibilities of the transcendent but does not conflict with central postmodern assumptions about the emptiness, absence, and ubiquitous confinement of the created world. For example, Dick invokes the Gnostic concept of the "unknown" or "alien" God to answer the question of God's apparent refusal to manifest himself despite the terrible suffering and chaos of the late twentieth century: "The key concept to explain this is the idea of the *deus absconditus*, the hidden, concealed, or unknown god" (38). [xxv] In other words, Dick answers the problem of evil's incompatibility with a benevolent God by attributing suffering to an "occluded" Demiurge. He then finds hope by looking to a higher transcendent force, inaccessible in its totality but scattered through the cosmos as "fragments of light" (86). This is precisely the theological maneuver that Bloom movingly describes as the Gnosticism at the heart of the "American Religion":

> If you have a religious temperament, or a yearning for religion, and yet you cannot accept Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, or Muslim explanations as to why an

> omnipotent God permits the perpetual victory of evil and misfortune, then you may be tempted by Gnosticism, even if you never quite know just what Gnosticism is, or was. [. . .] The God of Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad seems equally indulgent towards schizophrenia and the Holocaust. There is also the God of the Gnostic speculator Valentinus of Alexandria, and of the Kabbalist rabbi Isaac Luria of Safed, and that God is estranged or withdrawn from our world of hallucinations and death camps. (50)

Bloom thus eloquently and bitterly explicates the relevance of the Gnostic response to the problem of evil to a specifically twentieth century experience of history, focused around untreated mental illness and organized genocide. These are precisely the characteristics of Dick's "Black Iron Prison" world, which he associates with schizophrenia and a nightmare totalitarianism that includes Nazi atrocities.[xxvi]

Despite the overall oppressive darkness of their fictional universes, Pynchon and Nabokov abound in examples of the generative potential of transcendent presence in facilitating resistance to archontic hegemonies. Enzian bases his proclamation that "you are free" on the experience of presence, which he invokes when he insists to Katje that "there *are* things to hold to. None of it may look real, but some of it is. Really" (659, italics in original). Enzian's comic repetition of "really" indicates his own insecurity with both presence and freedom, a persistent self-questioning necessitated by his experiences of constraint in the technocratic and sadomasochistic rocket culture of Captain Blicero. Enzian also notes the dangers of Blicero's escapist transcendence, which only establishes the Captain higher up in the archontic hegemony of "Them." As

Enzian explains, "He's gone beyond *his* pain, *his* sin—driven deep into Their province, into control, synthesis and control" (661).

Enzian's struggle with his own past and the suicidal members of his tribe causes him to skeptically interrogate his own quest for freedom, since he is acutely aware of the ease with which freedom can become complicit with nihilism. In his early episodes in Gravity's Rainbow, Enzian seeks an "Eternal Center" for his people, ambiguously defined as a "stillness" that would oppose their past wandering and persecution (319). Despite Enzian's benevolent intentions, he is also aware that the search for a static "Center" is dangerously similar to the racial suicide advocated by Josef Ombindi's "Empty Ones" (319). Nevertheless, there is a difference between the two men's views even in their early stages of "rapprochement" (319). Ombindi works hard to persuade Enzian of the desirability of suicide through salesmanship and erotic seduction, yet Enzian never quite accepts Ombindi's nihilism (319-20). Indeed, the narrator's commentary on the humorous song "Sold On Suicide" implies that totalizing nihilism is extremely difficult. By "Gödel's Theorem" it is impossible to systematically renounce all value in the world without leaving out some item that renders one's list incomplete and thereby postpones suicide (320). As the novel progresses, Enzian's goals for his tribe increasingly oppose Ombindi's plans for destruction. After Enzian decides that his people should seek their freedom by deciphering the "true text" of military industrial conspiracy, he realizes that "the tribal numbers will have to increase." Since he will need "more Zone-Herero's, not fewer" he will oppose the "doctrine of the Final Zero" advocated by the Empty Ones (525). He acts on this change by preventing the vengeful

murder of Ombindi's follower Pavel as well seeking to stop a coerced abortion engineered by the Empty Ones (524-25). By the time of Enzian's final encounter with Katje, his search for freedom has become powerfully affirmative. Despite a poignant awareness of the question of freedom and a melancholy consciousness of the burden of responsibility entailed by making one's own choices, Enzian nonetheless chooses to emphasize the positive possibility of freedom as presence: "I told Slothrop he was free, too. I tell anybody who might listen. I will them tell them as I tell you: you are free. You are free. You are free" (661).

Enzian remains consistently attached to fragments of liberating, transcendent presence scattered through the world, a conviction that the narrator seems to corroborate through statements that could be ambiguously attributed to either Enzian's interior monologue or the narrator's commentary. For example, the episode with Katje ends with an unattributed echo of the phrase "There are things to hold on to" (663). Similarly, Enzian reminds himself in highly mystical terms of the presence of the real among entropic waste when he thinks that "Somewhere, among the wastes of the World, is the key that will bring us back, restore us to the Earth and to our freedom" (525). The narrator again offers tentative confirmation of Enzian's system of values when commenting on the inability of the decadent, nihilistic passengers of the Anubis to recognize worthwhile events or objects. While explaining that Thanatz is "better here with the swimming debris" than on board the Anubis, the narrator remarks parenthetically that "there is a key, among the wastes of the World . . . and it won't be found on board the white *Anubis* because they throw everything of value over the side"

(667-68). Like Lyle Bland's search for "the meanest sharp sliver of truth in so much replication, so much waste" and Dick's admonition that "the symbols of the divine show up in our world initially at the trash stratum," Enzian's aphorism suggests that liberating fragments of transcendent presence remain scattered in lowly, unexpected places (Gravity's Rainbow 590, VALIS 228). However, in order to be liberating, the sparks of transcendent presence must be known. The Gnostics called this liberating knowledge *gnosis*, and Pynchon, Nabokov, and Dick all represent possibilities of it.

Freedom as Liberating Knowledge

These various forms of transcendent presence allow for possibilities of liberation because they provide a source of positive knowledge that can better enable value and action than the negative, skeptical knowledge of poststructuralist theory. As Jonas acknowledges, the promise of access to sacred knowledge is not exclusive to Gnosticism but "the claim of all true mysticism" (35). What makes Gnosticism more adaptable for postmodern artistic purposes than other forms of mysticism is the background against which this knowledge takes place. Like poststructuralist theorizations of the postmodern condition, Gnosticism posits an empty and inauthentic cosmos ruled over by an oppressive hegemony. Nevertheless, postmodern fiction suggests that because sparks of transcendent presence are scattered through this void, they can be known as intimations of freedom. The Gnostics declared "that what makes us free is our knowing," thereby positing a connection between a special kind of knowledge and liberation. The term "Gnostic" derives from the word "*gnosis*," which means "knowledge" in Greek. Each scholar of Gnosticism has a slightly different interpretation of what this knowledge entails, though all emphasize that for the Gnostics the word connotes more than the rational, logical knowledge of philosophy. Jonas describes *gnosis* as "closely bound up with revelationary experience [. . .] so that reception of the truth either through sacred and secret lore or through inner illumination replaces rational argument and theory" (35). Pagels further explains that *gnosis* connotes not "scientific or reflective knowledge" but "knowledge through observation or experience" (xix). She adds that "as the gnostics use the term, we could translate it as 'insight,' for gnosis involves an intuitive process of

knowing oneself" (xix). Layton acknowledges that "knowledge" is the "basic translation" of gnosis but maintains an even stricter distinction between "propositional" knowledge "*that* something is the case" and "personal acquaintance with an object, often a person." He therefore consistently renders *gnosis* as "acquaintance" in his translation of the Nag Hammadi texts (9, italics in original).

Despite the linguistic distinction between mystical revelation and propositional knowledge, many scholars of Gnosticism suggest that *gnosis* may also involve access to an arcane body of information considered to be liberating, such as mythological history, cosmological structure, and a mode of navigating through the universe. Jonas emphasizes this aspect of *gnosis* in his inclusion of "sacred and secret lore" as a component of knowledge in addition to "inner illumination" (35). Jonas discusses these other forms of knowledge as aspects of *gnosis*, which

> comprises the whole content of the gnostic myth, with everything it has to teach about God, man, and world; that is, it contains the elements of a theoretical system. On the practical side, however, it is more particularly 'knowledge of the way,' namely, of the soul's way out of the world, comprising the sacramental and magical preparations for its future ascent and the secret names and formulas that force the passage through each sphere. (45)

In other words, *gnosis* also involves knowledge of a myth, defined by Layton as a narrative expression of "a system of symbols within which readers can orient themselves and make sense of their relationship to the world, the divine, and other people" (xvii).

Adaptations of *gnosis* in postmodern fiction draw upon the semantic complexity of the term to open up possibilities of liberating knowledge that are forbidden by poststructuralist theory. Postmodern fictional versions of *gnosis* do not always conform to the division between experiential acquaintance and propositional knowledge suggested by Pagels and Layton. However, they do adhere to a distinction between ordinary rational knowledge and a metaphysically deeper, more efficacious form of knowing. Pynchon, Dick, and Nabokov all utilize the concept of *gnosis* to suggest a form of liberating knowledge that is transcendent, positive, and assertive, in contrast with the skeptical, negative, and critical knowledge of poststructuralism. In postmodern novels, *gnosis* is a peculiar hybrid between spiritual intimation and spiritualized information.

Because the sparks of transcendent presence are fragmentary and non-totalizing, individuals know them through intimations of possibility rather than certain revelations of actuality. An intimation is not a certainty or a full explanation, but rather a tentative suggestion that nonetheless constitutes a form of knowledge. As the Oxford English Dictionary explains, an intimation is "the action of making known or expressing merely; an expression by sign or token, an indication; a suggestion, a hint" (OED Online). Although some second-century Gnostics did hope for an eventual apocalyptic revelation of complete truth, the idea of *gnosis* already suggests the concept of intimation more than revelation. The trope of the sparks suggests that, however much the Gnostics desired an eventual retreat to a *pleroma* of fullness and all-suffusing light, they also recognized the value of fragmentary intimations in a world of uncertainty and emptiness.

While the scholarship of Gnosticism already suggests that *gnosis* can contain an element of arcane lore in addition to mystical illumination, postmodern authors heighten this ambiguity by associating *gnosis* with information theory. They use the cybernetic vision of improved access to information as a metaphor for the reception of spiritual insight, and they suggest that improved information retrieval and processing can liberate human beings. In a world where interlocking spheres of geo-political and technocratic power maintain themselves partly through the possession of arcane and disorienting information, knowledge allows a way to seek freedom within the world. This freedom of movement resembles Jonas' "knowledge of the way" by which the Gnostic soul moves through the archontic spheres. Thus, in Techgnosis, Erik Davis memorably refers to contemporary cybercultural seekers of freedom through information as "Gnostic infonauts," a phrase that emphasizes "navigation" through labyrinths of information (76-101).[xxvii] This information can enable action by either spatially orienting the subject or using disorientation itself as a source of insight.

Pynchon, Nabokov, and Dick each develop the *gnosis* of the pneumatic spark as potentially liberating from the particular archontic hegemony of their fictional universes. Pynchon's sparks convey a sense of subversive, anti-rational "immediacy" that can enable the Counterforce to fight against "the System" or "Them." Nabokov's *gnosis* consists of moments of intense aesthetic epiphany involving perception of artistic or scientific detail so exquisitely precise that it acquires a numinous quality. These privileged aesthetic moments resist the oppressive generalizations and philistinism of the archontic authorities, who seek to eradicate all idiosyncratic acts of imaginative

excellence. Finally, *gnosis* in Dick's world suggests the possibility of a transcendent rationality that can counteract the irrational occlusion of schizophrenic selves, totalitarian governments, and the metaphysically flawed "Black Iron Prison" of a deranged demiurge.

Nabokov represents *gnosis* as the heightened influx of transcendent information, often manifested through the aesthetic epiphany of exquisitely detailed knowledge about the natural world. Cincinnatus experiences gnostic intimations of liberation throughout Invitation to a Beheading, and he relies on them to survive within the confines of his prison and ultimately to escape his imprisonment. Thus, despite the dungeon-world of his incarceration, Cincinnatus exclaims "what gleams shine through at night!" (93). These "gleams," akin to Wordworth's "visionary gleam," are intimations of freedom received as a spiritual birthright. Cincinnatus dreams of "there," a realm that is both socially and metaphysically more real and more liberating than his botched archontic world. His hymn to "there" rhapsodically invokes a Platonic or Neoplatonic realm which constitutes the "original" for the "clumsy copy" of his world. Cincinnatus' intimations of having formerly belonged to this world and possibly belonging to it again in the future give him a tentative sense of freedom in his current plight, as when he declares that "my soul expanses so freely in its native realm" (94). Similarly, dreams of "There" transfigure the world, making it temporarily "majestic, free, and ethereal" (92).

Cincinnatus' oft-repeated "I know something" becomes a talismanic phrase to which he clings throughout his torment and confinement. This phrase defiantly proclaims the "crime" of "gnostical turpitude"—a forbidden knowledge of the

transcendent—as a source of strength and agency. Cincinnatus declares, "I repeat (gathering new momentum in the rhythm of repetitive incantations), I repeat: there is something I know, there is something I know, there is something" and "When still a child [. . .] I knew without knowing, I knew without wonder, I knew as one knows oneself, I knew what it is impossible to know—and I would say, I knew it even more clearly than I do now" (95). Cincinnatus repeats this phrase obsessively throughout the book, though this ineffable knowledge always partially eludes verbal expression, as he suggests when he comments "I know something, I know something. But expression of it comes so hard!" (91).

These comments about precious knowledge that cannot be fully expressed echo Nabokov's own answer to the interview question "Do you believe in God," to which he evasively but suggestively replies, " I know more than I can express in words, and the little I can express would not have been expressed, had I not known more" (45). [xxviii] While this convoluted sentence can be taken in many ways, one interpretation would be that Nabokov himself experienced intimations of transcendent knowledge that he regarded as essential to his process of literary creativity. In other words, experiences of the inexpressible were generative of verbal expression—so generative, in fact, that they could not be dispensed with. Alexandrov firmly states this idea as the main thesis of Nabokov's Otherworld, which argues that "the central fact of both Nabokov's life and art was something that could be characterized as an intuition about a transcendent realm of being" (4). Toker directly associates these Nabokovian intimations of the transcendent with Gnosticism when she argues that Nabokov's "favorite brand of mysticism seems to

have been the gnostical belief in a transcendent reality that can occasionally be glimpsed through the chinks in our material existence and which is fully attained at death" (4). According to Vera and Dmitri Nabokov, Nabokov's literary and personal lives were bolstered by precisely such intimations. Grossmith refers to this as the "'official' family version" of Nabokov as "poetic visionary and secular mystic" (52). As Alexandrov notes, Vera Nabokov famously declares that Nabokov's "main theme" was "*potustoronnost*," a Russian phrase that means "the beyond" or "the other side."[xxix]

Nabokov's instants of mystical *gnosis* consist of the precise aesthetic and scientific knowledge of individual details, glimpsed with a luminous exactitude that borders on the mystical and that can provide a portal of entrance for intimations of the transcendent. For Nabokov, only individual details constitute "reality," as opposed to the "general ideas" that he loathes.[xxx] Nonetheless, "presence" and "transcendence" are valid explanatory terms for the reality—material and mystical—accessible through these details. These numinous minutiae include precise scientific knowledge in fields such as butterfly collecting and botany, as well as exact literary knowledge of particular images in works and meticulously accurate biographical facts about authors. Such forms of knowledge facilitate artistic effort and allow the approach to, if not the attainment of, "reality." Nabokov explains that he tends to place "reality" in quotation marks because of the importance of imagination in constructing the outward world, yet he nonetheless continues to use the word (154). This usage suggests that a "real" external world exists and can be known to greater and lesser degrees by human beings, in direct contradiction

of the poststructuralist interdiction of presence. Nabokov also expresses this search for reality in terms of acquiring information. Thus, he explains in an interview that:

> reality is a very subjective affair. I can only define it as a kind of gradual accumulation of information; and as specialization. [. . .] You can get nearer and nearer, so to speak, to reality; but you can never get near enough because reality is an infinite succession of steps, levels of perception, false bottoms, and hence unquenchable, unattainable. (11)

While this description sounds superficially like différance, in which reality is endlessly deferred, Nabokov's concept of increasing information through specialization also entails increasing reality. His example of a "lily" or "any other kind of natural object" clarifies this belief in degrees of reality or presence reached through the acquisition of information. Nabokov argues that "a lily is more real to a naturalist than it is to an ordinary person. But it is still more real to a botanist. And yet another stage of reality is reached with that botanist who is a specialist in lilies" (111). These "stages" of reality never constitute absolute plenitude, but they are degrees of presence experienced through the *gnosis* of specialized information.

Similarly, both Pynchon and Dick associate *gnosis* with the heightened influx of information by utilizing cybernetics or "information theory," a branch of science prominent in the 1940's and 50's that dealt with the transmission of coded messages and their role in the control of mechanical devices. Harold Bloom beautifully evokes the analogy between Gnosticism and information theory when he writes that:

> Gnosticism was (and is) a kind of information theory. Matter and energy are rejected, or at least placed under the sign of negation. Information becomes the emblem of salvation; the false Creation-Fall concerned matter and energy, but the Pleroma, or Fullness, the original Abyss, is all information. (30)

Dick explicitly associates *gnosis* and information in Exegesis entry twenty-four, in which he writes, "**In dormant seed form, as living information, the plasmate slumbered in the buried library of Codices at Chenoboskion**" (60). The term "living information," which Fat defines as "the Logos," implies both that the information in the Nag Hammadi texts is somehow itself alive and enlivening, but it also suggests information for the purpose of living. As Norbert Wiener declares in The Human Use of Human Beings, "To live effectively is to live with adequate information" (18).

While Wiener seems to have in mind everyday sensory input and newspaper stories rather than transcendent revelation, Dick nonetheless draws on the cybernetic valorization of information in order to suggest the salvational power of transcendent intimations. He makes this concept explicit in Exegesis entry 48:

> **'Salvation' through *gnosis*—more properly anamnesis (the loss of amnesia)—although it has individual significance for each of us—a quantum leap in perception, identity, cognition, understanding, world- and self-experience, including immortality—it has greater and further importance for the system as a whole, inasmuch as these memories are data needed by it and valuable to it, to its overall functioning.** (96, boldface in original)

This entry incorporates *gnosis* into a larger metaphor of the universe as a "computer-like thinking" system in which human beings are "memory coils," and *gnosis* in this image constitutes the increase of information or its improved reception (96). VALIS repeatedly associates Fat's experience of the divine pink light with *gnosis*, presence, and information, as in the phrase "whatever divine presence it was that had fired tons of information into his skull in 1974" (98). This experience revolves around the acquisition of knowledge, as suggested by the density of the word "know" in one of Dick's early descriptions. Fat believes "that instantly—as soon as the beam struck him—he knew things that he had never known. He knew, specifically, that his five-year old son had an undiagnosed birth defect" (22). Later, Dick describes the beam as "information-rich colored light, imparting to [Fat] knowledge beyond the telling" (71).

Heretical reading can utilize the cybernetic version of *gnosis* to respond to the poststructuralist objection that knowledge is always already interfered with by the mediation of différance, since this objection is already addressed by the Gnostic concern with entropic "noise." The Gnostics themselves also showed an almost prescient awareness of the problem of noise as interference to the experience of the transcendent. Jonas notes the Gnostic trope of the "noise of the world," archontic distractions that interfere with and distort transcendent revelation, as a theme in Mandaean scripture (73-74). Erik Davis expands upon this analogy between Gnosticism and information theory at several points in Techgnosis, and he further extends the metaphor by applying cybernetic ideas to Jonas's interpretation of the Gnostic-influenced "Hymn of the Pearl" in the Christian apocrypha (94-98). According to Jonas, this hymn depicts the

redemptive "call from without" as a precious letter whose message can awaken its recipient from his benighted condition (119-22). Davis attributes to the Gnostics a proto-cybernetic obsession with the proper reception of information-bearing messages, as he eloquently explains when he writes that "the Gnostic sought the pure signal that overrides the noise and corrosive babel of the world" (94-95). He further elaborates, "The Gnostic signal must penetrate the thick interference of the world, a world that is not only flawed but ruled by a conspiracy of ignorance—of noise" (98).

The resulting cybernetic necessity of filtering signal from noise appears throughout VALIS and the VALIS trilogy. The mixture of signal and noise gives urgency to Fat's quest to distinguish between the two. Fat's most crucial act of filtering occurs during his confrontation with the apparent incarnation of divinity in the child Sophia. Fat judges his own sanity by his ability to distinguish this child from her cultish, drug-addled parents: "I could separate the beautiful child from the ugly Lamptons. I did not lump them together" (212). Fat's version of *gnosis* is based upon rationality and hence prompts the question, "what are the criteria of rationality, by which to judge if wisdom is present?" His filtering process involves applying these criteria to separate the rational from the irrational: "Wisdom has to be, by its very nature, rational; it is the final stage of what is locked into the real" (213).[xxxi] The Tractate: Cryptica Scriptura included as an appendix to VALIS is itself the result of an act of Gnostic-inspired filtering of the eight thousand page Exegesis down to its most compressed and central axioms. Dick explains that these passages have been culled "from the inferior bulk," a phrase derived—according to Sutin—from a "Gnostic text" (VALIS 91, Divine Invasions 225). This

phrase echoes Dick's statement earlier in the book that "the rational, like a seed, lies concealed within the irrational bulk," which in turn alludes to the concept of the "living information" in the Nag Hammadi texts as concealed "in dormant seed form" (72, 60). The Tractate is thus a heretical reading of the Exegesis, the title of which suggests that it is also the record of an act of interpretation. Not only can the texts of Pynchon, Nabokov, and Dick be interpreted through a process of heretical reading, but they themselves model this method through hermeneutic exercises depicted within the novels.

In order to survive within the hostile historical and theoretical context of postmodernity, the intimations of transcendent presence hover in a bizarre and exhilarating middle ground between poststructuralism and mysticism, or metafiction and metaphysics. This intertwining of metafiction and metaphysics can best be seen in similar descriptions of *gnosis* in The Divine Invasion and Bend Sinister, both of which depict beams of light that bring otherworldly insight to characters. Dick vividly represents the intrusion of presence in the semi-autobiographical narrative of Herb Asher's *gnosis* in a beam of pink light:

> With the pain and the pink light came understanding, an acute knowledge; [. . .] This world was a simulation, and something living and intelligent and sympathetic wanted him to know. Something cares about me and it has penetrated this world to warn me . . . and it is camouflaged as this world so that the master of this world, the lord of this unreal realm, will not know; [. . .] This is a terrible secret to know. (174)

Similarly, Krug in Bend Sinister experiences *gnosis* in the form of intimations of Nabokov—his authorial creator—and the "transcendent" realm of the real world in which Nabokov writes (232-33). Like the pink light in the VALIS novels, these intimations appear as a "beam of pale light," which brings awareness of the world as irreal in both the post-structuralist sense of "socially constructed" and the Gnostic sense of "metaphysically flawed and illusory" (18). Herb Asher's "acute knowledge" consists in part of a theologically-inflected Baudrillardian recognition of the world as an "unreal realm" or "simulation" in the sense of a manufactured, hyperreal, hologramatic imitation without an original. At the same time, Asher attains the metaphysical knowledge of an ineffable "something," described as "living and intelligent," which is more real than the deconstructed simulation.[xxxii]

Several characters in the fictions of Pynchon, Dick, and Nabokov experience a similar *gnosis* that is simultaneously metaphysical and metafictional. In each case, a character has the uncanny realization that he is living in a novel, that the world which he previously regarded as real is in fact a fictional, verbal construction. While this event can certainly be aesthetically delightful in itself, it is often far more than mere game-playing for its own sake. The eerie exhilaration of these passages frequently derives from the metaphysical implications of the novels' fictional structures and the characters' realizations about them. When a character recognizes their world to be an unreal fiction, they often also perceive cryptic signs or intimations of the real world in which the writer and the reader dwell. However, if the reader begins by partially suspending disbelief in the fiction and regarding it as a mimetic representation of the "real," extra-textual world,

then a metafictional epiphany within the text can imply that the world of the reader may not be real either. This disquieting insight may also give rise to the exhilarating possibility that there may be a transcendent realm outside of the physical, visible world of everyday existence, which can periodically manifest itself hierophanically in moments of *gnosis*.

In addition to the aesthetic effects of the metaphysical implications of metafictional *gnosis*, the ontological intimations of a transcendentally real world can liberate characters, authors, and readers from the constraints of oppressive hegemonies. *Gnosis* can be even more liberating than the recognition of the social construction of reality that emancipatory versions of poststructuralism practice, because a metaphysical insight can emancipate individuals not just *from* negative societal constraints but *into* a more vital and creative existence as well. Critique of ideological constructions is finally insufficient to generate liberating agency; having recognized the constructedness of an oppressive ideology, individuals and groups are left with no impetus by which to create a new, more liberating value or practice.

Though Pynchon, Nabokov, and Dick celebrate intimations of presence apprehended by the imagination and intuition, poststructuralist theorists and their followers reject *gnosis* in favor of negative and skeptical knowledge. While Derrida, Caputo, and Nancy sometimes acknowledge affinities between deconstruction and negative theology, they reject the intuitive knowledge of presence connoted by *gnosis* as well as the mystical tradition from which it emerges. In "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials" from the collection *Derrida and Negative Theology*, Derrida explains that his

"uneasiness" with similarities between deconstruction and negative theology is "directed toward the promise of the presence given to intuition or vision" (79). He argues that even if this vision or intuition rigorously critiques and limits its own claims to truth through the use of negations and paradoxes, the deconstructionist denial of "the immediacy of presence" requires him to reject this form of knowledge (79). Although Caputo attempts to read Derrida from a religious viewpoint, he also confirms the difference between *gnosis* and deconstruction. He argues that Derrida rejects "inwardly possessed intuitive vision, union, knowledge, or experience" because it is associated with the "hyperousiology" of negative theology and Neoplatonic tradition (34).

"Hyperousiology" refers to the negative theologians' strategy of denying God's presence or existence in order to demonstrate that his greatness is "beyond being" (Greek "hyper" and "ousios"). Derrida's repudiation of this strategy in favor of différance, which eludes the maneuvers of negative theology, means that he also rejects intuitive knowledge of presence in the form of *gnosis*. Caputo suggests that this refusal of mystical knowledge carries with it a rejection of mystical interpretation that seeks hidden meaning, since for "Derrida the secret is there is no secret, i.e., no hidden semantic content, no privileged access, no transcendental signified, no hyperessential intuition" (34). Nancy, despite his interest in the concept of presence, rejects the knowledge of a unifying correspondence between word and thing, an ambition which he abjures as a residual element of the mystical tradition in philosophy. He writes, "There is in all philosophy, always, too much of Paracelsus. There is always too much magic, too much alchemy, there are always too many 'correspondences,' there is always too much mysticism or gnosis even

in philosophies based principally on reason—and are there really any others?" (179). According to Nancy, even rationalist philosophies seek unattainable knowledge of the thing itself through the unification of words and things. Despite rejections of *gnosis* by Derrida, Caputo, and Nancy, postmodern novels enact ways in which the knowledge of transcendent presence can introduce the possibility of freedom. One central form of this liberating knowledge is consciousness of the self.

Freedom as Spirituality Constituting Self-Awareness

The postmodern novels of Pynchon, Nabokov, and Dick can be read through Gnosticism to conceptualize freedom as a spirituality constituting the awareness of an inner self free from outward societal constraints. According to poststructuralist theorizations of postmodernity, self-awareness is the ultimate mystification because it obscures the determinisms that construct subjectivity. There is no essential inner self to be conscious of because identity is primarily a performative attempt to conform to various constructions of socially required external behavior. In contrast, when postmodern novels are read through Gnosticism, they suggest that freedom can emerge from a *gnosis* of an inner self that is inherently free, as distinct from the outer self that can be controlled by the various hegemonies and ideologies that condition perception and identity.

Elaine Pagels's descriptions of *gnosis* in The Gnostic Gospels can help to theorize how liberating knowledge of transcendent presence can be applied specifically to spiritual awareness of self. Pagels describes *gnosis* as "self-knowledge as knowledge of God," a formula which corroborates Jonas's analysis of *gnosis* as the awareness of a

portion of the divine within (119). She depicts Gnosticism as a process of difficult, solitary searching of the individual psyche in order to arrive at spiritual insight, an enterprise that she directly compares to artistic creativity (119-141). She writes that "gnostics, like many artists, search for interior self-knowledge as the key to understanding universal truths" (134). Such an arduous process ultimately results in liberation from the constraints of the world, including both the body and the "blind forces" of destiny (145). By disclosing knowledge of a transcendent spiritual self, the Gnostic can be freed from the constraints of all aspects of the self and world that are neither real nor spiritual: "realizing the essential Self, the divine within, the gnostic laughed in joy at being released from external constraints" (145).

Bloom's description of Gnosticism as a religion of spirituality constituting self-awareness also bears great relevance to this aspect of freedom in Pynchon, Nabokov, and Dick. Bloom expresses this version of Gnostic theology most clearly in his interpretation of The Gospel of Thomas. Bloom argues that a pneumatic spark that was not created by the Demiurge cannot fall and is therefore free of the constraints of the fallen world ("A Reading" 112). For Bloom, the "American religion" is ultimately a hidden form of Gnosticism because Americans believe on a deep level that their innermost self is prior to and independent of the physical world and any form of social construction. Thus, Bloom supports his argument by a simultaneous appeal to the American reader's experience of selfhood and the reflections of this experience in the two opposite poles of avant-garde literature and conservative politics: "all any of us need to do to begin to understand Gnosticism is to ask ourselves: What do I actually regard my

innermost self as being? In that secret place, Ronald Reagan and the characters of Thomas Pynchon's fictions blend together" (50). Bloom thus insightfully suggests Pynchon's thematic preoccupation with self-awareness, but he unfortunately fails to distinguish between Reaganite politics and Pynchon's revolutionary fiction. This mistake results not from Bloom's conceptions of Gnostic selfhood, but from his treatment of agency and choice, as I will demonstrate in the final section of this chapter.

Like Pagels and Bloom, Nabokov represents *gnosis* as a strong version of self-conscious and self-assertive spirituality. He depicts through Cincinnatus and to some extent Krug an almost quasi-Romantic possibility of a pure inner selfhood untainted by the police states that attempt to control it. Cincinnatus exemplifies this attitude toward selfhood when he imagines the most inner aspect of his identity as a "final, indivisible, firm, radiant point," and he also speaks of the awareness of the "mainspring of my 'I'" as a crucial component of his forbidden knowledge (90). However, he only reaches this selfhood by a process of skeptical "divestment," since the outer aspects of the self are quite vulnerable to conditioning, torment, and destruction by the oppressive authorities. The distinction between inner and outer forms of selfhood resembles the Gnostic separation of the psyche—the "natural" mind or soul and the *pneuma*—the uncreated, unfallen spark.[xxxiii] Krug in Bend Sinister also imagines an inner self, who he refers to as "the stranger," watching serenely even when he loses his composure (7).[xxxiv] Krug imagines this self as "my saviour" and "my witness," and he faintly suggests the Gnostic affinities of this internal savior by admitting that "this was the last stronghold of the dualism he abhorred" (7). He also expresses the irreducibility of this self in mathematical

terms by observing that "the square root of I is I," since a number that yields itself as its own square root suggests an extreme degree of indivisibility (7).

At the same time, Nabokov also emphasizes the dangers of confusing the freedom of the inner self with a naïve over-confidence in an invulnerable ego. In a collection of comments on critical articles, Nabokov pairs Invitation to a Beheading and Bend Sinister as "the two bookends of grotesque design between which my other volumes tightly huddle" (Strong Opinions 287). The two novels are "bookends" because their representations of freedom complement and correct one another. Cincinnatus eventually proclaims the invincibility of his inner spark of selfhood, but only after divesting the multiple outer layers of vulnerability that allow his captors to torment him (90). Krug initially claims utter personal invulnerability when he answers Paduk's statement that "all we want of you is that little part where the handle is" by declaring "There is none" (146). However, he soon finds that there is indeed a "handle" in his emotional attachment to his son, which can be manipulated by Paduk's henchmen to control Krug's behavior. While Krug does eventually receive the *gnosis* of a higher reality that allows him to defy his irreal persecutors, he gains this freedom only through overwhelming personal loss and the disillusionment of his overly simplistic and optimistic confidence in his own strength.

The idea of an inner self that can be reached through skeptical interrogation of outer layers of culturally and linguistically constructed identity derives in part from existientialist philosophy, especially that of Martin Heidegger in Being and Time. Heidegger distinguishes between the "they-self" or "Self of the everyday Dasein," versus the "authentic self" (167). For Heidegger, "they" is the term for the collective, everyday

being of Dasein as represented in the average human beings who enforce conformity and inauthenticity (163-66). Heidegger's "they" produces the "idle talk" that constitutes everyday discourse of "publicness," which consists of unconsidered, clichéd, and trendy received ideas that obscure the hard-won truths of phenomenological investigation (214). Heidegger's "they" is the precursor of ideology and hegemony in poststructuralist theories, since the discourse of the "they" "prescribes one's state-of-mind, and determines what and how one 'sees'" (213). Pynchon's use of "They" to refer to the interlocking conspiracies throughout *Gravity's Rainbow* derives partially from Heidegger's existentialist vocabulary. However, Pynchon's "They" is both more systematically oppressive and more demonically menacing than Heidegger's "they," who are simply representatives of "averageness" and not demonic and technocratic conspirators.

While the search for a free inner self in postmodern novels is influenced by Heidegger's ideas of Dasein's authentic self, Heidegger's version of selfhood is secular and totalizing rather than a spiritual intimation. Nabokov's image of a core or "radiant point" of selfhood surrounding by layers of obscuring bodily and ideological constraints resembles Heidegger's notion of the authentic self as the core of Dasein. The "process of divestment" described by Cincinnatus is similar to Heidegger's description of the "disclosure of Dasein" through "a clearing-away of concealments and obscurities" and a "breaking up of the disguises with which Dasein bars its own way" (167). However, in contrast to Nabokov, Pynchon, and Dick, Heidegger's version of the authentic self is existential rather than spiritual. Heidegger explains that "Dasein's essence is grounded

in its existence" and not in "spirit" or in any other way of being, since concepts of selfhood other than existential ones are "tantamount to volatilizing the real 'core' of Dasein" (152-53). Nabokov and Dick draw upon Gnosticism in order to represent the self as a fragment of divinity thrown into the world from another, whereas Heidegger's definition of Being is resolutely this-worldly. Thus, Heidegger rejects "otherworldly" speculations about death and the metaphysical nature and origin of evil, whereas Nabokov, Pynchon, and Dick embrace these topics (298). Heidegger distances his concept of self-consciousness from transcendence and spirituality by warning that "conscience," the faculty that attests to Dasein's potential for authenticity, should not be confused with "the 'immediate' consciousness of God" (313). Instead of spiritual intimations, Heidegger's version of the "freedom" of the authentic self consists in "an impassioned *freedom toward death*" that resolutely accepts mortality yet remains deeply anxious about it (311). Heidegger regards this acceptance as a form of freedom because the "they-self" does not recognize that each death is deeply individual and cannot be subsumed into the collective "idle talk" of everyday discourse. He emphasizes that Dasein's "ownmost" potential is "Being-for-Death," whereas Gnostic-influenced postmodern novels suggest that the inner selfhood is free because it is a fragment of divinity (298). Finally, whereas the self depicted in postmodern fictions is a non-totalizing fragment of freedom, Heidegger's version of the authentic self is highly totalizing. He claims that "temporality" is the "meaning of the Being of Dasein's totality" (425). Although this authentic self is realized in a "moment of vision," Dasein understands in this moment that its Being is "stretched" without break across every

instant from birth to death (387-88, 442-43). Characters in novels by Pynchon, Nabokov, and Dick also perceive their free selfhood in fleeting instants, but they accept that this selfhood will appear only as intimations and not as the meaning of Being in its "totality." In contrast to Heidegger's moment of vision, these intimations do not suggest a totalizing answer to the meaning of existence in the form of temporality.

Pynchon represents an even more rigorously skeptical examination of selfhood than Nabokov that ultimately restores freedom by revealing a capacity for deliberate choice. He vividly models this process in the section describing Pirate Prentice's dream-like passage through the "Counterforce hell" after his defection. This section contains pervasive references to heresy and to freedom, beginning with a humorous and apocryphal quotation from the Gospel of Thomas, which is often labeled as a Gnostic text. This epigraph—"Dear Mom, I put a couple of people in hell today . . ."—functions on multiple levels (537). For many Gnostics, the created world already was hellish and imprisoning, so that an additional underworld of punishment was unnecessary and even redundant. The Nag Hammadi texts and scholarly works on Gnosticism rarely mention hell, and Pynchon's use of a fabricated Gnostic quotation in the humorously irreverent form of a letter home from Christ to his mother may help account for the peculiar character of the Counterforce hell.[xxxv] Indeed, this bizarre, labyrinthine space seems to be more purgatorial than hellish. It houses "convalescent souls" and undertakes the distinctly pedagogical goal of initiating former victims and servants of the archontic authorities into awareness of their complicity in oppression and of possibilities for resisting it. The Counterforce hell also revolves around the theme of heresy, as when

inmates debate "what else but the Heresy Question" and Pirate Prentice finds a committee labeled "HERESY" given equal billing with the various technological committees central to Gravity's Rainbow (538, capital letters in original). The Counterforce hell is thus a well-suited fictional space in which to practice heretical reading; indeed, its purpose may partially be to teach such an interpretative strategy.

Counterforce hell constantly prompts its occupants to skeptically question the freedom of their selfhood, a theme exemplified in what Sir Stephen Dodson-Truck calls the "Nature of Freedom drill" (541). Dodson-Truck explains, "At the moment I'm involved with the 'Nature of Freedom' drill you know, wondering if *any* action of mine is truly my own, or if I always do only what They want me to do" (541). This form of contemplation articulates the central dilemma of poststructuralist debates about power and subjectivity while also suggesting ways to move beyond this conundrum. If all subjective intention can be reduced to inadvertent complicity in prevailing discourses of power—as Foucault and the New Historicists suggest—then even actions meant to promote "freedom" inadvertently serve the dominant power structure. This paradox severely problematizes ambitions for personal identity and can potentially lead to a reduction of human beings to mere cybernetic machines that inevitably obey their social programming—an anxiety suggested by the "Radio-Control-Implanted-In-The-Head-At-Birth problem" that Dodson-Truck has been assigned as a spiritual exercise or "koan" (542).[xxxvi] However, the pedagogical implications of a "drill," and the spiritually instructive purposes of a "koan," suggest that the question of freedom is not futile.[xxxvii] Instead, this question can be emancipatory precisely because it forces one to become

conscious of ways in which the freedom of selfhood is lost or compromised rather than to complacently ignore them.

Indeed, the Counterforce hell seems largely founded upon the paradoxical premise that freedom can be arrived at partially through an experience of its loss. Thus, a Jesuit priest officially serves as "DEVIL'S ADVOCATE," who argues that "Once the technical means of control have reached a certain size, a certain degree of *being connected* one to another, the chances of freedom are over for good" (539). However, if this is the position of a designated "devil's advocate," then the overall goal of the Counterforce must be to promote remaining possibilities of freedom. Similarly, the Counterforce hell is structured architecturally on the principle of loss in its spatial sense, as when a taffy clew, described as a "standard orientation device," guides Prentice along a "labyrinthine path" through winding corridors meant to disorient as much as orient (537). In Pynchon, the possibilities for genuine freedom are thus disclosed by the loss of a naïve capacity to act independently and by apparent loss within a bewildering maze of interlocking power structures.

The structure of the Counterforce hell resembles the archontic cosmos, which Jonas describes as a labyrinthine plurality of spaces that the Gnostic soul must navigate to find freedom. Jonas writes, "The plurality [of the Gnostic term "the worlds"] denotes [. . .] the labyrinthine aspect of the world: in the worlds the soul loses its way and wanders about, and wherever it seeks an escape it passes from one world into another that is no less world" (52). An important component of *gnosis* involves the awareness of the structure of this imprisoning maze as well the skills necessary to master and eventually

escape it (45-46, 52-53). While escape from the world into a transcendent *pleroma* is not an option in Pynchon's universe, the Counterforce nonetheless seeks opportunities for freedom within the "disquieting structure" of their purgatory. Thus, this disorienting spatial multiplicity combines traits of the archontic cosmos and Jameson's description of the "world space of multinational capital." Jameson argues that the representation of this system occurs in the "cognitive mapping" of such productively disorienting spaces as fictionalized cyberspace or the Bonaventure hotel (37-39, 44, 51, 54). The bewildering complexity of these spaces is useful because it gives the subject practice in the perceptual tools necessary to determine his place in the world of late capitalism (51-54). As a Marxist, Jameson claims that the knowledge of one's position, as well as "the world and its totality," can ultimately be gained through "Marxian 'science,'" which provides "just such a way of knowing and conceptualizing the world abstractly" (53). This unmediated, scientific knowledge is Marxist sociology in Jameson's view rather than the *gnosis* of transcendent presence. However, its overall aim is presumably emancipatory in the sense of facilitating the union and rebellion of the lower classes against their oppressors. Thus, the aims of the Gnostics and Marxist versions of postmodern theory converge in the "disquieting structure" of the Counterforce hell, a pedagogical maze designed to make human beings acutely aware of their own "lostness" in interlocking spheres of domination, so that they might find their way again to presence and freedom (Gravity's Rainbow 537).

In Pynchon, freedom as self-awareness can thus be reached through a skeptical distrust of the ways that one's selfhood has been constrained. For example,

'Merciful' Evans describes the results of his purgation in the Counterforce hell: "Think of the free-dom? [. . .] I can't even trust myself? Can I. How much freer than that can a man be?" (543). Evans gains a bitterly ironic yet moving freedom through "self-consciousness" in its more negative sense of a skeptical suspicion of the ways in one's subjectivity is unwittingly controlled. One of Pynchon's narrators in Gravity's Rainbow also describes the process of freedom through loss in Slothrop's "plucking the albatross of self" (623). Significantly, however, the one feather that Slothrop cannot pluck is the "ghost-feather" of "America," to which he remains attached as a form of desperate hope in a "way to get back" to freedom (623). Thus, Pynchon's perceptions of freedom through loss are more skeptical and historically contextualized than Nabokov's intimations of an inward self. However, Pynchon shares with Nabokov the Gnostic attitude that a capacity for authentic human choice remains after the confrontation with coercion and compromised freedom.

Freedom as Agency and Choice

The possibility of freedom as spiritual self-consciousness in turn enables the potential for agency and choice, which poststructuralist theorizations of postmodernity dismiss as blindness to historical and social determinisms. Because sparks of presence, selfhood, and knowledge enter the world rather than offering a retreat from it, they allow individuals to act and choose within the context of contemporary history and politics. In other words, *gnosis* of the sparks conveys agency, transcendental in origin but engaged with the postmodern condition. Specifically, *gnosis* enables individuals to engage with the world of technology through what Erik Davis calls "techgnosis" and Stuart Moulthrop dubs "paragnosis." Technologies are broadly understood as systems of cognition enabling action, including especially the electronic system of textuality called "hypertext." The proto-hypertextual characteristics of novels by Pynchon, Dick, and Nabokov give rise to version of choice that is "navigational" rather than hierarchical in that it involves a freedom to choose between branches or forks of thought and action. In addition, agency involves the interpretative choice to link various separate entities—such as the spark-like intimations of transcendent presence or the elements of an archontic conspiracy—in a deliberate and creative manner opposed to the pre-determined patterns of a hegemonic order. Both these hermeneutic strategies facilitate a personal and collective struggle for freedom against archontic hegemonies and power elites.

Agency and choice must be regarded as different from a desire for hierarchical power in postmodern adaptations of Gnosticism, since the need for power is archontic. Instead of worshipping power as an end in itself, the Gnostics attacked power as the

source of their hatred for the world; as Jonas puts it, "Power thus becomes the chief aspect of the cosmos, and its inner essence is ignorance" (328). Jonas correctly explains that the representatives of this power are the demiurge and his archons. However, he misleadingly and contradictorily argues that "a world degraded to a power system can only be overcome through power" (329). If a desire for power over others stems from ignorance, and the Gnostics sought knowledge as a corrective to ignorance, then they must also necessarily have sought something other than power: freedom. Pagels supports this interpretation by explaining that the Gnostic Valentinian initiation entailed the recognition that all the demiurge's claims to divine power were ultimately false and derived from ignorance. The Gnostics could allegorically regard all those who sought hierarchical power, including the leaders of the orthodox church, as representatives of the demiurge (36-38). Thus, according to the famous Valentinian Gnostic treatise, The Tripartite Tractate, the ignorance of the archons and the lowliest men manifests itself as a lust for power: "There is no knowledge for those who have come forth from them with arrogance and lust for power and disobedience and falsehood" (84). This condemnation of the desire to dominate recurs throughout this book (74, 76, 95). The Gnostics attempt to counter this power not through seeking power as an end in itself but through the use of power to liberate themselves. In contrast with those who seek archontic power over others, the Tripartate Tractate states that Gnostics sought "release from the captivity and acceptance of freedom" (94). Pagels implies that this freedom is not just for the self but for others, since the Gnostic churches organized themselves according to "the principle of equal access, equal participation, and equal claims to knowledge" (42).

The various forms of freedom available by reading postmodern novelists through the Gnostics culminate in possibilities of agency conceived as sparks of energy or stability from outside the world which allow individuals to modify an ideological structure in which they are otherwise trapped. Transcendent presence, liberating knowledge, and spirituality as self-consciousness all provide a way of engaging with the dilemma of agency, which is severely problematized by poststructuralist theorizations of postmodernity. This dilemma is sometimes expressed as the problem of Archimedes's lever, an allusion to the ancient Greek scientist's declaration that he could move the earth with a lever if he only had a firm place to stand. If poststructuralism emancipates through the recognition of the ideological constructedness of systems of power, it also undercuts the foundations for action. Poststructuralism suggests that emancipatory philosophies of resistance to power are also ideological constructions with no ontological foundation, thereby offering little psychological basis for change other than the arbitrarily defined interests of a community. The sparks of presence cannot restore the foundation of Western metaphysics in its entirety, but they can nonetheless offer a force, an impetus for choice and action.

The conceptualization of *gnosis* as entrance within the world rather than a solitary retreat from it involves a swerve from Bloom's version of Gnosticism that can better account for postmodern texts. Though Bloom brilliantly expresses the insight that *gnosis* can enable freedom, his conception of Gnostic freedom involves a retreat into an apolitical and solitary *pleroma*. For Bloom, freedom largely entails isolation from the "presence of other selves" in a transcendent realm modeled on the Gnostic *pleroma*,

which he also refers to as "the abyss." He evocatively describes this *pleroma* when he writes that "an abyss within the self finds itself at peace when it is alone with an abyss that preceded the world God made. The freedom assured by the American religion [. . .] is a solitude in which the inner loneliness is at home in an outer loneliness" (31).

Bloom's tendency to describe *gnosis* as a solitary retreat into a *pleroma* is consistent with his overall depiction of Gnosticism and the Gnostic-informed "American Religion" as apolitical or even aligned with conservative fundamentalist politics. In The American Religion, Bloom frequently either attempts to dissociate Gnosticism from political action or argues that Gnosticism tends to lead to conservative elitism—a political situation that he firmly states even while expressing distaste for it. While conveying an apolitical version of Gnosticism, Bloom argues that "The American Religion always has asked 'What makes us free?'; but political freedom has little to do with the question" (31). Bloom draws this boundary because he is justifiably anxious that the spiritual experience of *gnosis* might be excluded from the contemporary academy through sociological and historical reductions (43). However, the divorce of Gnosticism and political freedom has the unfortunate consequence of leading Bloom to identify conservative American politicians as Gnostic. Thus, Bloom writes that because "the Reagan-Bush national Republicans have become one with the American Religion, my fear is that we will never again see a Democrat in the Presidency during my lifetime. The religion of the spark or pneumatic self consistently leads to a denial of communal concern, and so perhaps to an exploitation of the helpless by the elite" (58). Bloom admits that these political consequences may not be inevitable, but he asserts that his

modeling of Gnosticism renders them a "persuasive" fiction (58). By conceptualizing Gnosticism as a religion of apolitical isolation, Bloom offers no other political alternative to the destructive conservativism of the American religious right.

Pynchon, Nabokov, and Dick offer a more "persuasive," and ultimately much more positive and politically liberating, version of Gnosticism by associating it with political agency and choice. They thereby allow this second-century heresy to interact with the context of egalitarian, democratic, and emancipatory American politics. Describing *gnosis* as an intrusion into the world rather than a retreat from it allows intimations of transcendent presence to interact with a historical and ideological context that enables collective political action. The sparks can facilitate not a retreat from society and history, but an attempt to modify political institutions in a liberating manner that fulfills the Gnostic myth of resistance to the archons. Moreover, the sparks need not exist in isolation from one another, but they can be meaningfully linked in ways that respect their unique autonomy while at the same time facilitating collective political action.

Members of the Counterforce frequently draw upon numinous sparks to motivate their struggles for freedom. Pynchon suggests the Counterforce's reliance on tentative fragments of *gnosis* when he explains that "Those like Slothrop, with the greatest interest in discovering the truth, were thrown back on dreams, psychic flashes, omens, cryptographies, drug-epistemologies, all dancing on a ground of terror, contradiction, absurdity" (582). This phrase accurately characterizes the uncertain, non-totalizing, yet empowering mystical experiences of several countercultural rebels in Gravity's Rainbow

as well as fictions by Nabokov and Dick. Pynchon's emphasis on a "ground of terror, contradiction, and absurdity" acknowledges a lack of firm foundation to the choices of the Counterforce. However, his image of "dancing" on this uncertainty suggests that productive movement can take place through the agency of a moving force. Hence, Arrabal's "anarchist miracle" is partially fulfilled through the "deaf dance," in which an entire convention of deaf dancers—each dancing according to his own impulse—miraculously moves in synchronized harmony (The Crying of Lot 49 131). Similarly, Pirate's defection into the Counterforce hell ends in a "race and swarm of dancing preterition," in which previously isolated victims and servants of the System "feel quite in touch with all the others as they move" (548).

Gnosis also operates to generate possibilities of agency in VALIS, in which the "early secret Christians" are empowered by their status as "agents" of the "plasmate" found at Nag Hammadi. Whereas Pynchon's version of *gnosis* involves a valorization of countercultural irrationality, Dick's *gnosis* is transcendentally rational. Dick writes: "The immortal plasmate had invaded our world and the plasmate was totally rational, whereas our world is not. This structure forms the basis of Fat's world-view. It is the bottom line" (112). Dick explains that the Empire has "suffered a crippling, perhaps terminal, blow, at the hands—so to speak—of the immortal plasmate, now restored to active form and using humans as its physical agents. [. . .] Horselover Fat was one of those agents. He was, so to speak, the hands of the plasmate, reaching out to injure the Empire" (112). When faced with a hegemonic structure of ubiquitous occlusion, a "hard" knowledge from outside that structure can provide the energy needed to resist oppression. Because

characters often arrive at the disclosure of this *gnosis* through stumbling rather than heroic attainment, the word "agency" has a double meaning. On the one hand, it suggests human beings as vessels or tools of transcendent energy, possessed by divinity and used to advance its liberating ends. At the same time, "agent" suggests "agency," meaning that a transcendent rationality gives the "early secret Christians" a basis on which to act after the Black Iron Prison has been recognized as a constructed fiction.

Lyle Bland's encounter with the Masons, which transforms him from an oppressive techno-industrial archon into a countercultural mystic, epitomizes the Gnostic political agency of the Counterforce.[xxxviii] Pynchon explains this process when he writes:

> Just as there are, in the World, machineries committed to injustice as an enterprise, so too there seem to be provisions active for balancing things out once in a while. Not as an enterprise, exactly, but at least in the dance of things. The Masons, in the dance of things, turned out to be one of these where Bland was concerned. (580)

Bland discovers that while Masonry is largely a "spectacle" meant to "consolidate what were only secular appearances of power," "magic" is still somehow "latent" in Masonic rituals, "needing only to touch the right sensitive head to reassert itself" (588). Bland's mystical experiences, which leave him "raving about the presences he has found out there," primarily act as a Counterforce by removing him from the machinations of industrial capitalism and its secularized conspiratorial attempts to manipulate human beings such as Slothrop (589). However, these experiences also make Bland aware of a different, non-rationalized conspiracy, suggesting that "the U.S.A. was and still is a

gigantic Masonic plot under the ultimate control of the group known as the Illuminati" (587). This Masonic Counterforce, like all conspiracies, runs the risk of becoming archontic, as suggested in the phrase "ultimate control." Nevertheless, Pynchon suggests that benevolent, or at least emancipatory, conspiracies are also possible, as he implies when he observes that "too many anarchists in 19th-century Europe [. . .] were Masons for it to be pure chance" (587).[xxxix]

These references to the Masons and the Illuminati place Pynchon's Counterforce into a larger, historically mediated understanding of Gnosticism as a form of secret heretical resistance to oppressive orthodox power-structures. Dick and Nabokov both also draw upon this understanding of Gnosticism. Thus, Pynchon's key reference to Gnostic resistance to "the Church of Rome, generalized to mean any System which cannot tolerate heresy" occurs within a Tarot-reading whose details Pynchon derives from A.E. Waite. Waite belonged to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, a nineteenth-century mystical society that drew on Gnosticism in its rituals.[xl] Because of this association, Pynchon complements the Gnostic reading of the Tower card with an interpretation from "members of the Golden Dawn" (747). Groups like the Masons and the Golden Dawn—popular, mystically-inclined secret societies of the nineteenth and twentieth century—mediate modern and postmodern understandings of the Gnostics as a group of illuminati in possession of a privileged insight that allows them to alter society. The Masons, whose activities have been alternately viewed as sinister and benevolent, perfectly embody the razor-thin division between archontic and Gnostic behavior highlighted by postmodern fictional treatments of Gnosticism.

Having represented possibilities of agency, Pynchon, Nabokov, and Dick conceive this form of freedom in terms of navigational choice rather than hierarchical domination. In contrast to the desire for hierarchical power, postmodern versions of Gnosticism represent heresy as a choice between alternate forks and branches. Pynchon provides the paradigmatic example of this form of agency in his description of William Pynchon's imaginary heresy in terms of "forkings."[xli] Thus, Pynchon writes of William Slothrop, "could he have been the fork in the road America never took, the singular point she jumped the wrong way from? Suppose the Slothropite heresy had had the time to consolidate and prosper? Might there have been fewer crimes in the name of Jesus, and more mercy in the name of Judas Iscariot?" (556). This emphasis on forkings, of a diverging path that presents two options for continuation, gestures toward the etymological origins of the word "heretic," which can be traced to the Greek "*hairetikós*," meaning "able to choose" (Oxford English Dictionary Online). Because of William Slothrop's representation of a heretical alternative to actual religious and secular history of America, Tyrone Slothrop's meditations on his heretical Puritan ancestor temporarily open "vistas of thought" that are normally closed to him (556). He associates these vistas with the "anarchist" Squalidozzi and his search for revolutionary freedom through the unrestricted territory of the Zone (556). Slothrop's musings lead him to not just a lamentation for unavailable possibilities, but to tentative hope in a different path from the one of intolerance and oppression that America has chosen: "It seems to him that there might be a route back [. . .] a single set of coordinates from which to proceed, without elect, without preterite" (556). Thus, Slothrop imagines a path that would open

the way to navigational agency rather than hierarchical domination. The imagery of heresy as a freedom to choose between forkings of thought also evokes Culiano, who conceptualizes Gnosticism as the freedom to take all the forbidden branches in a religious "game" of binary forking paths, some of which are activated and others closed off in a given era and location (239-48). For Culiano, the Gnostics were "champions of free thought in Western history" because of their insistence on the "freedom to think through not one but all possible choices of a logical problem" (242).

For Pynchon, the question of freedom is intimately linked to moments of crucial forking similar to William Slothrop's heresy, and he tends to valorize the heretical tendency to choose the "road not taken" or "less traveled." Other forkings in the novel concerned with the question of freedom include Roger Mexico's confrontation with a moment in which "he has to choose between his life and his death" (713). Similarly, Prentice admonishes Mexico that his conspiratorial thinking "takes a wrong fork" by neglecting to construct a "We-System" that could provide him with a sense of agency (638). Osbie Feel explains the possibility of creating a Counterforce in terms of choice among multiple paths: "In the Parliament of Life, the time comes, simply, for a division. We are now in the corridors we have chosen, moving toward the Floor" (536). Even Pointsman, committed to strict, deterministic Pavlovian behaviorism, yearns for a heretical escape that he imagines in terms of a spatial branching within a labyrinth— "an exit from the orthodox Pavlovian" (Gravity's Rainbow 141). Along with these examples of the liberating power of choice, negative forkings also appear in which characters fail to fully recognize crucial choices, such as the moment in which Gottfried "knows,

somehow, incompletely, that he has a decision to make" about his role as sacrificial victim in Blicero's plan for the ascent of rocket 00000 (724). Although Gottfried ultimately fails to make this choice or is prevented from making it, the narrator presents this moment in terms of an exercise in reading. The narrator may intend that readers might seek freedom by choosing how to interpret Gottfried's failure or constraint. Thus, the passage foreshadows the heretical reading of Weissman's tarot by urging that this "scene itself must be read as a card," but that the card "is preserved, though it has no name, and, like the Fool, no agreed assignment in the deck" (724). The narrator ascribes great importance to the reader's chosen interpretation, insisting that "It all poises here. [. . .] If there is still hope for Gottfried here in this wind-beat moment, then there is hope elsewhere" (724). Of course, in the actual events of the book there is no hope for Gottfried, who is sacrificed in the rocket. However, by placing emphasis on this crucial moment as an exercise in reading, Pynchon encourages the reader to consider "the fork in the road" that these events might or should have taken.

Pynchon also offers the story of Byron the Bulb as an example of a character who takes a "wrong fork" in his misguided enactment of Gnosticism. Byron is a failed revolutionary whose desire for totalizing knowledge, transcendence, and revolution causes him to become an archon. Although there are Gnostic elements in the description of Byron, far more details suggest that this character has horribly twisted the Gnostic drive for freedom into a ruthless quest for power. Byron is an immortal bulb, "an old, old soul trapped inside the glass prison of a baby bulb" who is persecuted by a light bulb cartel that seeks to thwart his "meanest hope of transcending" (648, 650). When he

gradually becomes aware that the cartel is manipulating the existence of all bulbs in a way that interlocks with the various archontic "They-systems" of the novel, he hatches revolutionary plans to "organize all the Bulbs, see, get him a power base in Berlin" (648). From the beginning, however, the narrator labels these schemes as "really insane grandiose plans," suggesting that Byron's will-to-totality casts doubt on the validity of his revolutionary efforts (648). After the revolution fails, Byron continues to gain knowledge of the "pattern" of power controlling all the bulbs, and he becomes increasingly frustrated by inability to bring about change despite this knowledge (654-55). This frustration leads to his subliminal manipulation of a low-ranking soldier, who (the narrator strongly implies) will slit the throat of his immediate superior because of Byron's promptings.[xlii]

While Bloom reads the Byron episode as a sign that Pynchon's *gnosis* is despairing, this reading is valid only if one interprets Byron as the key Gnostic character of the book. If the primary aim of Gnosticism is freedom—an idea that Bloom himself argues eloquently throughout The American Religion—then Byron's initial lust for power already makes him a deeply flawed Gnostic. Bloom writes that "Byron, unlike Slothrop, cannot be scattered, but his high consciousness represents the dark fate of the Gnosis in Pynchon's vision" (3). As noted earlier in the chapter, Bloom extrapolates from the Byron episode that Pynchon's version of Gnosticism lacks transcendence in the form of a *pleroma* to which the Counterforce can retreat, just as Byron finally cannot take refuge in the "structureless pool from which all glass forms spring and re-spring" (651). Bloom also laments that "Byron the Bulb does achieve Gnosis, complete knowledge, but

purchases that knowledge by impotence, the loss of power" (8). There are several flaws in this reading resulting from Bloom's definition of the elements of Gnosticism, which differs from Pynchon's use of these concepts. In Pynchon, *gnosis* does not constitute "complete knowledge" but rather tentative and non-totalizing intimations of presence and transcendence. Pynchon's "Gnostic or Cathar" reading of the Tower tarot card critiques the desire for totalizing knowledge as inimical to Gnosticism because this goal tends to create a "System which cannot tolerate heresy," symbolized through the "church of Rome" (Gravity's Rainbow 747, see also chapter one above). As I argue in this chapter's section on presence and transcendence, Pynchon's version of transcendence manifests itself through hierophanic intrusion of sparks of divinity into the world rather than the retreat to a pleroma. These intimations do not enable mass revolution, but rather they encourage tentative yet significant acts of rebellion. For example, "the leading edge of revelation" rather than complete knowledge allows Mexico to confront Pointsman (631).

Pynchon significantly places Mexico's induction into the Counterforce directly before the story of Byron in order to contrast a finite but successful liberatory act with a dangerously tyrannical act of violence. The "Counterforce traveling song" rejoices that "we're bringing down Their system," yet Pirate Prentice and Osbie Feel both admonish Mexico that the "We-system" put in place of the "They-system" should not reproduce the rationalistic, totalizing qualities that it attempts to combat (640). The "We-system" of the Counterforce is an exercise in the linkages of "Creative paranoia" that takes into account its own constructedness through a deliberately anti-rationalistic refusal to "interlock"

perfectly (638-39). In contrast to the "We-system" of the Counterforce, Byron's misguided desire for totalizing power and knowledge degenerates further into a Foucauldian obsession with the knowledge of the "Grid" of "power" by which he and all other subjects are controlled (654). His engineering of the Colonel's murder is an act of senseless violence, since it will doom Pensiero and cause no lasting change in the actions of the military. The episode breaks off in mid-sentence, creating a cliffhanger ending that invites an interpretative choice from the reader as to whether Pensiero actually does slit the colonel's throat.[xliii] The possibility of a choice echoes the episode's earlier embedded fantasy dialogue between "Skippy" and "Mister Information" on the subject of "the points" (644-45). These "points" are the juncture at which railroad tracks split into two possible paths, controlled by a "pointsman" from whom the malicious Pavlovian doctor Pointsman takes his name. Pensiero remains suspended with "the points" of his scissors poised between passive complicity with the military and a morally repugnant act of revolutionary murder. Pynchon leaves the reader to discern other paths besides these two extreme binaries, such as Pirate Prentice's idea that one can still create a "We-system" even if one is inevitably complicit in the machinations of "They. "

Tyrone Slothrop's wanderings suggest other heretical paths, since the main plot of Gravity's Rainbow constitutes Slothrop's gradual realization of the ways in which he has been manipulated and controlled and a quest to regain agency through the acquisition of information.[xliv] While the end result of this quest is either failed or highly ambiguous, Slothrop's attempts to gain information regarding the Schwarzgerät constantly raise the question of freedom. Thus, Slothrop confronts the question explicitly after he first

escapes surveillance and conditioning at the Casino Herman Goering, when he muses, "Free? What's free?" (256). Like Stephen Dodson-Truck, Slothrop is wondering whether his rebellion and escape have in fact been engineered by the archontic "They." Slothrop's gradual revelation of his conditioning and manipulation by an international rocket-cartel increases his skepticism of the possibility of freedom, so that he responds to Enzian's labeling of him as a "free agent" with a muttered "don't know about that 'free'" (288). Only when Slothrop has learned the extent of archontic plots can he begin to receive information on how to evade them, as in Solange's suggestion that "by riding each branch the proper distance, knowing when to transfer, keeping some state of minimum grace though it might often look like he's headed the wrong way, this network of all plots may yet carry him to freedom" (603). Just as in William Slothrop's heresy and Culiano's version of Gnosticism, Slothrop's strategy for freedom consists in following the forbidden branches of an intricate network, of becoming a "heretic" in the sense of one "able to choose" his own path.

Slothrop's choices ultimately end in the fatal dwindling of his temporal bandwidth and his gradual dissolution, but he briefly serves as the rallying point for a number of characters who more successfully seek freedom through choice by defecting to the Counterforce. Thus, the narrator of Slothrop's final major scene before his dissolution muses on the role of cross shapes in the character's life and describes how he "becomes a cross himself, a crossroads" (625). This image implies that Slothrop's ambiguous end presents several possible interpretative choices to the reader and offers the various Counterforce members decisions as to how they should respond to Slothrop's

plight in their own quest for freedom. The emphasis on crosses suggests "*crux*," the Latin word for "cross" and the etymological root of "crucial." Thus, Slothrop emblematizes all enigmatic textual cruxes and crucial choices taken or not taken in the course of Gravity's Rainbow, which demand a method of heretical reading in which readers are "able to choose."

Postmodern fictional adaptations of Gnosticism do represent the possibility of multiple alternative interpretative routes, but they also suggest that *gnosis* provides a basis for ultimately choosing a path through liberating knowledge and especially the consciousness of selfhood. The possibility of *gnosis* in postmodern fiction can thus help respond to the dilemma of *aporia* raised by poststructuralism. Poststructuralism suggests that *aporias*—inevitable and unacknowledged self-contradictions within any intellectual position—reveal all truth claims to be rhetorical constructions and thus prevent the possibility of presence. If any position is necessarily self-contradictory and rhetorically constructed, then choice becomes meaningless. The claims to value and authenticity that provide the basis for a decision are themselves arbitrary fictions, all with equal validity or invalidity. Once recognized, such a situation can create paralyzing confusion, a state implied by the Gnostics' pejorative use of the term "*aporia*," although their writings of course occur long before the formal invention of critical theory. As Pagels explains, "*aporia*" connotes "confusion" in ancient Greek, a sense derived from its literal meaning of "'roadlessness,' not knowing where to go" (144). Based on a passage from the Valentinian Gospel of Truth, Pagels argues that *aporia* is one component of "the experiential beginning of the gnostic's search" (144). However, whereas

poststructuralism often posits *aporia* as the inevitable end result of a deconstructive operation, the Gnostics regarded the search for *gnosis* as a way of moving beyond *aporia* and finding a path. Jonas's further explanations suggest a navigational knowledge, an almost cartographic understanding of the "labyrinthine" multiplicity of archontic worlds and their arrangement (52-53). However, this knowledge is still an aspect of *gnosis*, so that by implication the inward knowing of transcendent presence can function as a guide among the winding paths of an imprisoning world.

The possibility of unmediated presence in a particular place and time, as opposed to an unbridgeable gap of différance, heightens the potential for conscious choice. If the experience of the present is always already mediated by culturally constructed systems of signifiers, then choices of perception and action have in effect already been made for individuals. In contrast, the hierophanic experience of presence, which Oedipa thinks of as "some immediacy" or lack of mediation, could allow for an element of vital and autonomous choice within a particular moment (31). Thus, when Christian prepares to assassinate Pavel, Enzian confronts a moment of "awful branching: the two possibilities already beginning to fly apart at the speed of thought—a new Zone in any case, now, whether Christian fires or refrains—jump, choose" (524). Enzian follows the injunction to "jump, choose" (which can equally be taken as Enzian's instruction in interior monologue to himself, an address by the narrator to Enzian, and an implied admonition to the reader) by pushing Christian's rifle barrel away from its target. Similarly, Roger Mexico inadvertently stumbles into a moment in which "he really does have to decide, and soon enough, plausibly soon, to feel the terror in his bowels. [. . .] He

has to choose between his life and his death" (713). Mexico realizes that he must choose between two equally repellent options: "living on as Their pet, or death" (713). The narrator reminds that passivity is also a negative choice, since "letting it sit for a while is no compromise, but a decision to live, on Their terms" (713).

Dick depicts a similar concept of freedom as a choice between branching paths through his concept of metaphysical "extrication." He represents "divine invasions" of a transcendent reality that can temporarily overwhelm the self but that can nonetheless assist authentic human choice. In VALIS, Dick discusses "extrication" in conjunction with the ancient idea of emancipation from the "astral determinism" that the Gnostics and other ancient mystery religions abhorred. As Dick explains, commenting on Fat's Exegesis, "the purpose of the mysteries was to free the initiate from astral determinism, which roughly equals fate" (121). Astral determinism refers to the astrological rule of the stars over human destiny, which the Gnostics resisted because they regarded this cosmological order as the malevolent work of the archons. Translated into postmodern terms, astral determinism is a metaphor for the various forms of social construction and conditioning that seek to control individual behavior. Fat himself updates this ancient concept into more modern philosophical terms when he writes that, "The lower realm

[. . .] is mechanical, driven by blind, efficient cause, deterministic and without intelligence [. . .]. In ancient times, it was termed 'astral determinism'" (121). The machine metaphor and the modern philosophical vocabulary of "determinism" bring an ancient concept of destiny into line with contemporary concerns about free will. Dick situates these themes in a postmodern context through the association of the ideological,

simulated Black Iron Prison with the "lower realm" (92). He also introduces the possibility of freedom through his own terminology of "extrication," a word which implies disentanglement from a confining network of difficulties (OED).[xlv] Fat's Exegesis explains, "**We are trapped, by and large, in the lower realm, but are through the sacraments, by means of the plasmate, extricated. Until astral determinism is broken, we are not even aware of it, so occluded are we**" (121).

Extrication involves a freedom to move; indeed, Dick associates it with being switched to another laterally branching "track" of time in "If You Find This World Bad, You Should See Some of the Others" (241-43). In this lecture, Dick envisions a Borgesian cosmology of alternate universes arranged along forking paths, created through a dualistic, computerized chess game between a benevolent deity and a "dark counterplayer." Dick's imagery simultaneously echoes Nabokov's chess "game of worlds" conducted by hidden forces in an "involute abode," as well as Culiano's model of Gnosticism as a freedom to choose between binary forkings (Pale Fire 63, Tree of Gnosis 239-48). Although Dick speaks of "upper" and "lower" realms, his concept of freedom often entails less a retreat into another realm than the liberty to move laterally along the route of one's choice, much like Slothrop switching "branches" of a metaphorical "transit system" to seek out freedom (603). As Dick explains, "instinctively people pray, '*Libera me Domine*,' which decodes to mean 'Extricate me, Programmer, as you achieve one victory after another; [. . .] Move me along the lateral axis so that I am not left out' (241). The phrase "*libera me domine*" means "free me God" in Latin, a

prayer that Dick sometimes recited in his own life to suggest possibilities of metaphysical liberation.[xlvi]

The ability to make a choice between forks depends upon the awareness that there is a choice to be made, which often requires the acquisition of previously concealed information and itself constitutes a form of *gnosis*. Heretical reading must thus search for crucial junctures, textual cruxes or moments of branching at which interpretation could proceed in more than one direction, just as characters must seek for similar moments in their lives. For example, Pynchon frequently offers religious interpretation of his works as a choice that the reader is free to follow or not, much like a hypertext branching. Thus, Pynchon writes that "If there is something comforting—religious, if you want—about paranoia, there is still also anti-paranoia" (434). By inviting the reader to make a choice with the phrase "religious, if you want," Pynchon opens the possibility that paranoia might be valorized as spiritual insight, depending on the reader's interpretative decision. Similarly, Pynchon describes Slothrop playing the blues on his harmonica as like a "spiritual medium" but also acknowledges "a secular angle for blues, if the spiritual one bothers you" (622, 643). In a humorous version of this invitation to interpretative choice, Pynchon asks of the infant Jesus in a manger scene, "Is the baby smiling, or is it just gas? Which do you want it to be?" (131). Similar interpretative branchings occur throughout Nabokov's Pale Fire, whose proto-hypertextual arrangement into cross-referenced lines and notes allows the reader to take a variety of significantly diverging paths through the book.

The enabling of interpretative choice by diverging paths through a text resembles technologically-based artistic and pedagogical strategies in numerous ways, especially through analogies with hypertext. In Hypertext 2.0, Landow explicitly draws parallels between the strategies of artistic disorientation of experimental fiction and similar possibilities available through hypertext. By disrupting habitual patterns of passive, linear reading, hypertext can actively involve readers and offer opportunities for choice that Landow and the theorists he cites repeatedly refer to as "liberating" and a form of "freedom." Robert Coover, an acclaimed postmodern author and one of the leading champions of hyperfiction, suggests that hypertext can generate "freedom from the tyranny of the line." This negative freedom from constrained linearity also allows a positive freedom to create one's own lines between hypertext nodes by linking creatively (Landow 119). Coover sees these possibilities of hypertextual freedom prefigured in several proto-hypertextual print authors, a view that hypertext author and theorist Stuart Moulthrop echoes through a key allusion to Gravity's Rainbow. Moulthrop suggests that the disorienting experience of hypertext might provide an emancipatory method to move outside of a hegemonic "system," whose destructive linearity he describes through Pynchon's quote that "Living inside the System is like riding across the country in a bus driven by a maniac bent on suicide" (Landow 119, Gravity's Rainbow 412).

The hypertextual emphasis on choice and branching off from a constraining linearity can allow for heretical resistance against orthodoxy rather than the negative interpretative freedom of poststructuralist indeterminacy. Hypertext need not only yield a poststructuralist web of signifiers infinitely deferred from reaching a non-existent

transcendental signified.[xlvii] Rather, some hypertextual links can be chosen on the basis of transcendent presence associated with them, a liberating knowledge of a path through them, and the awareness that a particular course corresponds to an aspect of one's authentic selfhood. Erik Davis suggests the Gnostic and mystical resonances of hypertext in his "Gnostic Infonaut" and "The Path is a Network" chapters of Techgnosis. Davis imagines Gnosticism, and systems of religious searching in general, as "technologies of the self" conducted along a "network path" rather than a linear one (333-34). Drawing upon images of hypertext and the web, Davis suggests that the network has as much applicability to contemporary spiritual experience as it does to mechanical, material technologies (326). Spiritual discovery is therefore less a matter of a linear journey, and more a process of associative "navigation" through mazes of information, necessitating the skills of a "Gnostic infonaut" to avoid loss amid the deceptive noise of technocratic archons (326, 76-102).[xlviii]

Freedom conceived as agency and choice also entails a form of textuality that allows the reader to choose to creatively link dispersed fragments, such as the spark-like intimations of presence or the elements of a technocratic, archontic conspiracy. Because the sparks are non-totalizing and scattered through a cosmos of absence and darkness, they invite a hermeneutic of linkage which weaves these instants into a larger, proto-hypertextual network. The formation of this network is not necessitated but rather encouraged by the text as a choice involving active cognitive and imaginative engagement of the reader's part. In Pale Fire, John Shade describes this interpretative strategy as "link-and-bobolink," a process of networked linking that compensates for the

absence of a totalizing symbol of absolute plentitude (63). A narrator of Gravity's Rainbow describes Tchiterine's experience of the paranoia-inducing drug Oneirine in similar terms involving creative linkage of disparate phenomena:

> like other sorts of paranoia, it is nothing less than the onset, the leading edge, of the discovery that *everything is connected*, everything in the Creation, a secondary illumination—not yet blindingly One, but at least connected, and perhaps a route In for those like Tchitcherine who are held at the edge . . . . (703).[xlix]

Like Tchitcherine, John Shade comforts himself after his hope of a totalizing revelation of the afterlife turns out to be unfounded by realizing that what matters is "not text, but texture; not the dream / But topsy-turvical coincidence, / Not flimsy nonsense, but a web of sense" (63). Shade's hope of complete plenitude, emblematized in the "white fountain" vision for which he vainly seeks confirmation, is nonetheless compensated for by a hermeneutic capacity to make connections. Similarly, Tchitcherine's "secondary illumination" compensates for his failure to experience the full revelation of the Kirghiz Light (359). This process of "link-and-bobolink" and numinous connectedness includes more than mere metafictional connections that allegorize chains of supplementarity substituting for an absent "transcendental signified" in Derrida. Rather, Shade's linkages suggest "some kind of correlated pattern in the game, / Plexed artistry, and something of the same / Pleasure in it as they who played it found" (63.812-15).[1] Shade's connections—intra-textual, intertextual, and extra-textual—mirror the operation of a group of metaphysical game-players in an "involute abode" whose potential existence

makes "ornaments of accidents and possibilities" (63.810-15). The possibility of transcendent realms and otherworldly beings partially redeems blind, meaningless chance by suggesting a numinous order to events that can be freely imitated through art. In other words, Nabokov's hermeneutic of linkage is simultaneously metafictional and metaphysical. Tchitcherine's connections are both metafictional, metaphysical, and political, enabling resistance to marginalization and providing a possible "way in" to recognizing linkages usually understood only by the technocratic power elite.

Dispersed, spark-like intimations of presence that can be linked hypertextually appear throughout Bend Sinister in the form of a puddle with numinous associations. This puddle recurs as a metafictional emblem of Nabokov's influence on the text and a metaphysical suggestion of the entrance of transcendence into the world. The shape thus appears in hidden forms throughout the novel, and its paradigmatic manifestation is the inkstain that forms a "code message" in Krug's dream. This stain "reveals the presence of someone in the know," and this "someone" is on one level Nabokov (64). He explains in the final pages of Bend Sinister that the shape is an actual puddle outside his window that Krug has "somehow perceived through the layer of his own life" (241). These appearances throughout the novel include the corresponding puddle outside the hospital where Krug's wife dies, an inkstain, spilled milk, the metaphorical "outline" of Krug's idea for an essay, and a footprint-shaped gleam of light in Krug's cell (1-4, 64, 149, 157, 232). Krug also recalls a legend that recently arrived souls in the afterlife first see "a welcoming group of the chalked outlines moving wavily like transparent Infusoria" (210). [li]

The interrelated appearances of this puddle encourage the "link-and-bobolink" of heretical reading, which Nabokov suggests through his own reading of the motif in his preface to the novel. He repeatedly uses the word "link" to suggest that interpreting the puddle involves not just the linear tracing of a recurring motif, but lateral and vertical connection to other elements. These include other intra-textual themes, the extra-textual world of Nabokov's authorial existence, and the metaphysical suggestion of possible transcendence. Thus, after cataloging the puddle's manifestations, Nabokov also explains that:

> the puddle thus kindled and rekindled in Krug's mind remains linked up with the image of his wife not only because he had contemplated the inset sunset from her death-bedside, but also because this little puddle vaguely evokes in him my link with him: a rent in his world leading to another world of tenderness, brightness and beauty. (xv)

The use of the puddle as an intimation of presence reflects the aesthetic emphasis of Nabokov's *gnosis*, since the opening of the novel describes this puddle in exquisitely precise, luminous, and richly poetic imagery (1-4). Nabokov fiercely valorizes specific details over general ideas, and this value requires that his manifestations of the transcendent involve exact aesthetic perception rather than hazy mystical jargon. However, specific detail can itself be numinous if represented with a combination of extreme exactitude and suggestions of the transcendent. Nabokov loathes the term "symbol" because of the reductiveness and lack of imagination he associates with psychoanalytic uses of the term, and his intimations are too fragmentary to fit the

Romantic view of the symbol as an organic whole standing in for a larger transcendent reality.[lii] Nabokov's puddle, or the butterflies and moths that often appear at possibly supernatural junctures in his fiction, do not symbolize anything. They are themselves fragmentary instantiations of presence that link to each other and potentially "link [Krug] somehow up with an unfathomable mode of being" (64).

Pynchon also encourages the process of interpretative linkage in the form of conspiracy theory, regarded as a form of heightened information acquisition and processing. John Johnston insightfully suggests the relationship between information theory and paranoia when he writes that Gravity's Rainbow "endorsed what had already become a given within the sixties counterculture: that paranoia no longer designated a mental disorder but rather a critical method of information retrieval" (62). This aesthetic of "creative paranoia" is not just an artistic game, but a pedagogical device that encourages active, non-linear, synthetic approaches to contemporary geopolitical politics and the techno-industrial organizations that often underlie it. Many of the most encyclopedic, stylistically virtuosic, and thrilling moments in Gravity's Rainbow involve the weaving of intricate conspiratorial correspondences between technological entities, often accompanied by mystical resonances. For example, a tour de force passage involving the beginnings of synthetic chemistry intimates ominous connections between Clerk Maxwell's field equations, the "double-integrating circuit" in the A4 rocket, the double integral shape of the Nordhausen Mittelwerken, as well as meta-correspondences between the benzene ring and the self-devouring serpent Ouroborous (sometimes regarded as a Gnostic and alchemical symbol) (411-13). Part of the ambiguity of

Gravity's Rainbow is to persistently cast doubt on the validity and even sanity of such reflections at the same time that they are invested with a sinister, paranoid beauty. Nevertheless, persistent reading of Gravity's Rainbow cannot help but alter the interpretative habits that readers bring to the examination of current events and technological developments.

Pynchon does not advocate indiscriminate adherence to irrational conspiracy theories, but he does suggest that the struggle for freedom requires a search for obscure connections between political and technological power structures. Moulthrop describes this capacity to recognize connections as a form of *gnosis*, which he calls "paragnosis" from "the root sense of paranoia, a parallel or parallax gnosis [which] happens to be a handy way to conceive of the meta-sense of pattern recognition that hypertext serves to enhance" (cited in Joyce 86). Moulthrop coins this concept based on his experiences as a scholar of Pynchon's "creative paranoia," and hence he conceives of paragnosis as a means of combating technocratic manipulation of information: "In dealing with vast and nebulous information networks—to say nothing of those corporate-sponsored virtual realities that may lie in our future—a certain 'creative paranoia' may be a definite asset. In fact the paragnosticism implicit in hypertext may be the best way to keep the information game clean" (cited in Joyce 87).

Pynchon prefigures paragnostic pattern recognition in both the séance with Walter Rathenau and Lyle Bland's initiation into the Masons. Both episodes involve the construction of a "paranoid structure," based on a possible encounter with the transcendent and composed of linkages between various military, industrial, social, and

religious organizations (582). In considering Bland's relationship to several other conspiratorial plots and narrative plot-lines in the book, the narrator reflects that "We would also have to show some interlock" between Bland and a film group connected with Franz Pökler as well as "*separate* connections" between other key players in the book "before we'd have a paranoid structure worthy of the name" (582, italics in original). In keeping with Johnston's parallels between paranoia and information retrieval, the narrator laments that "the state of the art by 1945 was nowhere near adequate to that kind of data retrieval" necessary to demonstrate these linkages and filter out the inauthentic information planted by Bland.[liii]

The séance with the disembodied Walter Rathenau also dramatizes the development of paranoid networks based simultaneously on metaphysical and technological methods of information retrieval. Rathenau's spirit admonishes his listeners that "If you want the truth—I know I presume—you must look into the technology of these matters" (167). His views of technology from the "other side" of existence involve seeing the "whole shape" of world affairs which can eventually be perceived by the departed as "a clear presence." This structure is composed of lines and convergences between arcane synthetic chemicals and the corporations that research them. The artificial color "mauve" thus "converges with the mauve-Perkin-Ganister line," which also features "a link to the United States" and a "link to Russia" (166). In Pynchon, conspiracy theory becomes a network of proto-hypertextual "links," like the html links forking invisibly through a web page or hypernovel.

Reading postmodern fiction in conjunction with Gnosticism thus brings into focus a larger heretical forking: the divergence between poststructuralist theorizations of the postmodern condition on the one hand and postmodern fiction and the Gnostic worldview on the other. Initially, these three entities run parallel with each other in their ambitions to emancipate individuals from the oppression of ubiquitous hegemonies and power elites through the deconstructive disclosure of absence. However, postmodern fiction and Gnosticism diverge from poststructuralism in their conceptualization of freedom as transcendent presence, as liberating knowledge, as a spirituality constituting self-consciousness, and as agency and choice conceived navigationally rather than hierarchically. Heretical reading constitutes the interpretative choice to follow this fork rather than the poststructuralist one. Chapter three will apply the insights derived from reading postmodern fiction in conjunction with Gnosticism to hypertext pedagogy.

[xviii] Grossmith corroborates the resemblance of this imagery to "The Hymn of the Pearl" (58).

[xix] The philosopher of religion John Caputo discusses the religious elements of Derrida's thought in The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida. He argues that there are apparent similarities between Derrida's theories and negative theology during his early and middle career but that Derrida ultimately rejects the movement's Neoplatonic metaphysical goals in favor of a messianic Jewish expectation of a "wholly other" yet to come (69). Caputo firmly and bluntly re-states Derrida's own insistence that deconstruction ultimately is not negative theology in the section heading "*God Is Not* différance" (1).

[xx] In "Postmodern/Post-Secular: Contemporary Fiction and Spirituality" Jonathan McClure utilizes this passage as an epigraph to suggest Pynchon's tentative endorsement of spiritual conceptions of the world (141).

[xxi] In Pynchon's Mythography, Kathryn Hume compellingly argues for the prevalence of supernatural agencies in Gravity's Rainbow, and she theorizes these elements in terms of a presence-oriented mythological approach meant to complement a poststructuralist recognition of absence (1-13). In The Style of Connectedness, Thomas Moore devotes a chapter to "The Gods of Gravity's Rainbow," in which he explores intimations of transcendence as one form of the novel's overarching connectedness (219-92). McClure also takes Pynchon as a key example of a postmodern valorization of spiritualized conceptions of the world that include supernatural elements (151-52).

[xxii] Thus, an experienced, personified agent of a human body's central nervous system responds to a naïve young operative's earnest belief that "we're in exile, we do have a home!" by summarizing and then rejecting Lurianic kabbalah: "It's been a prevalent notion. Fallen sparks. Fragments of vessels broken at the Creation. And someday, somehow, before the end, a gathering back home. A messenger from the Kingdom, arriving at the last moment. But I tell you there is no such message, no such home—only the millions of last moments" (148-49). The garbage-truck parody occurs in a cluster of kabbalistic references

near the end of Gravity's Rainbow, when Pynchon writes, "It's a Collection Day, and the garbage trucks are all heading toward Ventura Freeway [. . .] Returning to the Center, with all the gathered fragments of the Vessels" (757).

[xxiii] Johnson argues that this "two world model" extends throughout several of Nabokov's fictions and forms the basis for an "aesthetic cosmology" that may also suggest a "personal cosmology" involving mystical beliefs (1). The existence of two worlds also implies the proliferation of a vast number of concentrically embedded spheres, each of which mirrors the existence of a secondary plane or world (1-3). Johnson suggests that this cosmology derives partly from Neoplatonic and Gnostic models of the universe (2-3). Alexandrov, drawing upon Vera Nabokov's preface to Stikhi, conceptualizes Nabokov's transcendent realm as "*potustoronnost'*," which he glosses as "a noun derived from an adjective denoting a quality or state that pertains to the 'other side' of the boundary separating life and death" (3). He explains that the word might also be translated as "the hereafter" and "the beyond" (3).

[xxiv] These two realms also closely resemble the Gnostic-inspired cosmology of the Scurvhamite sect in The Crying of Lot 49, in which one world perfectly fulfills the benevolent will of God while the other operates "off some opposite Principle, something blind, soulless; a brute automatism that led to eternal death" (155). Emory Bortz, Pynchon's fictionalized professor of Jacobean literature, vividly describes the Demiurgic deity of this realm as a "blind, automatic anti-God," presiding over the "gaudy clockwork of the doomed" (165, 155). Unlike Pynchon's own fictional universe, the Scurvhamite myth embodies an extreme version of Calvinist predestination and leaves no room for freedom, yet its dualistic acknowledgement of an anti-God ruling over his own cosmos resembles Gnostic cosmology. In "The Sacred, the Profane, and The Crying of Lot 49," Mendelson briefly comments on the Gnostic overtones of the Scurvhamite sect (121).

[xxv] Despite the influence of Jung on Dick's initial interest in Gnosticism, Dick explicitly diverges from Jung by making "the unknown God" central to the version of Gnosticism in VALIS. Dick explains that "For some reason Jung regards this as a notorious idea. But if God exists, he must be a *deus absconditus*—with the exception of his rare theophanies, or else he does not exist at all" (38). Jung would have regarded the concept of a hidden, unknown God as "notorious" because it contradicted his conception of the Gnostic true God as embracing all contraries, including evil (Smith 538-41). Instead of this Jungian version of Gnosticism, Dick valorizes an alternate Gnostic explanation of evil which attributes flaws in creation to the Demiurge but posits a true God who transcends evil. Dick derives this version of Gnosticism from Hans Jonas, and it is also the account embraced by Harold Bloom.

[xxvi] The association of the Black Iron Prison with occlusion and schizophrenia appears throughout VALIS, and Dick describes this imprisoning world in terms of totalitarian police states and Nazism in "If You Find This World Bad, You Should See Some of the Others" (249-51). Jorge Luis Borges, whose labyrinthine postmodern fictions are both analogous to and influential on the writings of Pynchon, Dick, and Nabokov, corroborates the relevance of Gnosticism to postmodern responses to evil in his essay "A Defense of Basilides the False." Borges, defending the ideas of the Gnostic heretic Basilides and the Gnostics in general, analyzes their myth as a "quiet resolution of the problem of evil" (67). He quips with bitter irony, "What greater glory for a God than to be absolved of the world?," thereby suggesting that the concept of a Demiurge honors the true God by dissociating him from the botched postmodern world of suffering and emptiness (67-68).

[xxvii] The knowledge necessary to move freely within the world rather than out of it resembles Frederic Jameson's concept of "cognitive mapping" (51). He defines this enterprise, which he sees at work in cyberpunk fiction, as an imaginative cartography of an intricate, disorienting "network of power and control" that oppresses by the difficulty of envisioning it clearly (37-38).

[xxviii] Several critics quote this response as evidence of Nabokov's mystical tendencies (Grossmith 66, Toker 45, Alexandrov 4).

[xxix] Vera Nabokov's introduction to Stikhi, a posthumous collection of Nabokov's Russian poems, functions as a crucial piece of evidence for several critics inclined to mystical readings of Nabokov. All of these critics cite this preface, which according to Alexandrov has been translated into English in Dmitri Nabokov's "Translating with Nabokov" (Grossmith 66, Alexandrov 4-5, D. Barton Johnson 185).

[xxx] Nabokov valorizes precise details frequently in his essays and interviews. For example, he professes indifference toward the possible symbolism of butterflies in art and declares that "in high art and pure science detail is everything" (Strong Opinions 168). In another interview, he strongly condemns "general ideas" in response to a critic's objections to his focus on specificity (41).

[xxxi] Angel Archer also describes schizophrenia in terms of a failure to separate signal from noise. She reflects on the distinction between sanity and madness in terms of the signal-noise binary of "Shannon's information theory" when she ponders that a schizophrenic "simply recycles his own nutty thoughts forever, enjoying them even though, like transmitted information, they degenerate. They become, finally, noise. And the signal that is intellect fades out" (Dick Transmigration 239).

[xxxii] While Baudrillard references Dick at several points in Simulacra and Simulation, his theories yield inadequate readings because he treats Dick's fiction as a sterile, exhausted representation of "hyperreal" simulacra. Baudrillard argues that Dick's fiction comprises "a total simulation, without origin, immanent, without a past, without a future, a diffusion of all coordinates [. . .]—it is not about a parallel universe, a double universe, or even a possible universe—neither possible, impossible, neither real nor unreal: *hyperreal*—it is a universe of simulation, which is something else altogether" (125). These comments glaringly contradict Dick's own statements of his primary themes as "What is real?" and "What constitutes the authentic human being?" as well as his own stated interest in real and fictional alternate universes, discussed in "If You Find This World Bad, You Should See Some of the Others" ("How to Build a Universe" 260, "If You Find This World Bad" 233-58). Baudrillard avoids analysis of specific stories, giving only a brief reference to the early Dick novel The Simulacra and a general mention of "the short stories of Philip K. Dick" (123-25). Nevertheless, his impressionistic summary of Dick's aesthetic effects ignores the rich and moving drama conveyed by Dick's grappling with metaphysical questions that he took seriously. Baudrillard's theories reductively foreclose the possibility of transcendence in Dick, as when Baudrillard claims that in Dick "simulation is insuperable, unsurpassable, dull and flat, without exteriority—we will no longer even pass through to 'the other side of mirror,' that was still the golden age of transcendence" (125). Baudrillard's theories can account for Dick's deconstructive attacks on simulacra, but they egregiously overlook the intimations of transcendent presence that occur within these fictions and that fueled Dick's own creative life.

[xxxiii] Jonas explains this distinction thoroughly in The Gnostic Religion, and Bloom cites Jonas in his own application of Gnosticism to American experiences of identity (Jonas 123-24, American Religion 52).

[xxxiv] Krug's description of this watching self, "a familiar figure, albeit anonymous and aloof," closely resembles Walt Whitman's description of "the Me myself" in Leaves of Grass (Nabokov 7, Whitman 723). Whitman writes:

Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am
Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, unitary
Looks down, is erect, bends an arm on an impalpable certain rest,
Looks with its sidecurved head curious what will come next,
Both in and out of the game, and watching and wondering at it. (723)

Bloom also associates Whitman's "real me" or "me Myself" with the inner self of the American religion (26).

[xxxv] Weisenburger accurately observes that the Counterforce underworld is "a rather pleasant hell, an inversion of Dante's Inferno with its deeper levels of greater punishments. The version here is horizontally arranged, plastically changeable, and certainly not frightening" (233). Louis Mackey also blithely comments, "Pynchon's hell is populated (natch) with all the good guys, who in this (counter)narrative are (natch again) those who 'will *always* be bad' [GR 548]" (xxxiii). Jonas provides one possible Gnostic source for this inverted hell when he explains that for the Marcionite sect, hell was populated by all the rebels against the demiurge, and Christ harrowed hell with the sole purpose of redeeming these revolutionary figures (95).

[xxxvi] In Empire of Conspiracy, Timothy Melley discusses this anxiety in terms of his concept of "agency panic," an intense anxiety about individual autonomy evoked by paranoid conspiracy theories of control and utilized by authors of postmodern fiction (12). Melley sees "agency panic" as being ultimately an

indirect defense of conservative individualistic ideologies by representing them as in "imminent peril"(6-16). While Melley's terminology is useful, his rather hasty dismissal of what he considers a simplistic concept of independence fails to account for a deep and nuanced commitment to freedom in Pynchon's work. John McGowan's Postmodernism and Its Critics is of greater explanatory value, since it suggests that the "problem of freedom" is central to postmodern theory even when the concept is overtly deconstructed or outlawed (89-210).

[xxxvii] The concept of a "koan" is Zen Buddhist in origin, but its intended end result—an experiential, intuitive breakthrough into enlightenment—strongly resembles *gnosis*. Because of parallels between Gnostic and Buddhist theories of enlightenment, Pagels posits a possible Buddhist influence on the Gnostics in centers of cosmopolitan syncretism such as Alexandria (xx-xxi).

[xxxviii] Moore reads for positive mystical implications of the Bland episode and glosses many of Pynchon's allusions to Masonic lore, though he does not focus on Gnosticism or heresy (233-37).

[xxxix] Culiano analyzes ancient Gnostic allegiances to a countercultural "anarchism" that was based in transcendent presence rather than nihilism, and this context resembles the countercultural, rebellious politics of Pynchon's "anarchist miracle." Culiano writes:

> Gnostics have often been said to be anarchic, and in a certain sense they were, for they had created a counterculture by negating the main principles of culture. Yet in this text gnostic anarchism receives a quite interesting metaphysical explanation: Gnostics are said to be only those who worship not the Father who is the archē (beginning) of the universe but the Forefather (Propatos), who is anarchos (without beginning). (60)

[xl] Weisenburger traces Pynchon's source for the Gnostic reference in this passage and the Tarot reading in general to A.E. Waite's Pictorial Key to the Tarot (308-10).

[xli] In "Freedom and Knowledge in the Zone," James Earl insightfully contextualizes some of these forkings within the recurrent motif of the "points," the fork in a railroad line at which trains can be routed in two different directions (232-33). The controller of these junctures was known as "the pointsman," from which Pynchon derives the name of the character "Poinstman" and a key symbolic dialogue about the points (Gravity's Rainbow 644-45). As Earl explains, "the pointsman recurs in modern discussions of free will, as a metaphor, in fact, for the free will itself" (232). Earl sees William Slothrop's heresy as one of these forkings, but overlooks the prevalence of heresy as a paradigm for freedom and liberating exegetical strategies throughout Gravity's Rainbow (238).

[xlii] The interaction between Paddy McGonigle's pedaling of the hand generator and the messages sent by Byron forms a feedback loop. As the narrator explains, Byron is "dictating the muscular modulations of Paddy McGonigle's cranking tonight, this is a loop here, with feedback through Paddy to the generator again" (647). This loop is an oppressive manifestation of cybernetic control that suggests the word's etymological roots in "steering." Byron's cybernetic activities entail not the liberating transmission of information but rather the fascist "dictation" of a helpless human being's actions.

[xliii] In "Gravity's Rainbow and the Economy of Preterition" Louis Mackey sees Byron as an instigator of Pensiero's violent rebellion (xxxiv).

[xliv] Earl also sees Slothrop's struggle for freedom "as the central issue of the book's main plot" and associates Slothrop with emerging possibilities of a countercultural freedom that defies rational knowledge and can only occur outside of society (229, 232). While Earl skillfully analyzes freedom as a thematic element in Gravity's Rainbow, he sees Slothrop's freedom as fully achieved rather than ambiguous, even if gained at the price of isolation and dissolution. This definition of freedom does not account for Pynchon's interrogation of the nature of freedom itself, nor does it adequately describe the struggle of the Counterforce to engage in collective emancipatory political action. In Information Multiplicities, John Johnston also argues that Slothrop's "quest for information about the mysterious rocket containing the Schwarzgerät articulates the novel's central plot (in both senses)" (80). Johnston's view of Gravity's Rainbow as a mechanical "assemblage" somewhat forecloses possibilities of freedom, though he notes faint suggestions that Slothrop's gathered information might help him to escape overdetermination through passage into what technological theorists Deleuze and Guattari call "lines of flight" outside of linguistic and societal constraints (81).

[xlv] The OED defines "extricate" as "To disentangle (a person or thing); to disengage, set free *from*, *out of* (anything that entangles, a state of confinement, difficulty, or entanglement)" (OED Online, italics in original).
[xlvi] In Divine Invasions, Sutin translates "libera me domine" and cites an instance of Dick's personal use of this prayer (212).
[xlvii] Landow theorizes hypertext primarily through poststructuralist concepts of textual networks as formulated by Derrida, Barthes, Foucault, and Bakhtin. He also documents tendencies of many hypertext theorists to analyze hypertext in poststructuralist terms (33-48).
[xlviii] Although Davis's network imagery often involves a historically dubious collapse of Eastern and Gnostic motifs, including focus on the Buddhist image of Indra's net, Davis creatively establishes the Gnostic connection to associative spiritual technologies through Herman Hesse's Glass Bead Game. Hesse recounts that his fictional game of spiritual contemplation, which revolves around the drawing of contrapuntal connections between knowledge in a variety of disciplines, was invented in part by the "Hellenistic Gnostics" (Davis 331, Hesse 16).
[xlix] This passage is central for Moore, who reads Gravity's Rainbow under the aspect of Tchitcherine's experience of connectedness. Moore views this experience as emblematic of the "style of connectedness" (28, 220). He cautiously argues that the idea that "'drug-epistemologies' [528], mystical intimation, paranoid terrors, may possibly point to transcendental realities is at least, in Pynchon, a sort of background suspicion" (220).
[l] Moynahan associates this passage with the "Gnostic" elements in Nabokov's fiction when he writes that "John Shade [. . .] has the proper gnostic intuition when he imagines the world as a chess-like game played by aloof and masked contestants" (14). Moynahan concedes that he is using the concept of Gnosticism "simply and unhistorically" to suggest skepticism toward the material world and a belief in a cosmos controlled by "spiritual agencies" who may sometimes appear in revelatory moments "through cracks and apertures of mundane reality" (14). Moynahan's version of Gnosticism seems synonymous with mysticism more broadly understood rather than scholarly understandings of Gnosticism. He correctly suggests that intimations of the transcendent are in some sense Gnostic, yet he ultimately views the "cryptic signs and hints" of the transcendent pessimistically because they do not provide access to a totalizing realm of plentitude until death (14). These "cryptic signs and hints" can be productively understood as the pneumatic sparks, which are by definition dispersed and non-totalizing but nevertheless a source of consolation and potential freedom. Nabokov's use of the mysteriously ambiguous pronoun "they" resembles Pynchon's suggestions of archontic forces yet also differs from them in that Shade's game-players are more benevolent or at least neutral toward human affairs. Thus, metafictional imitation of their metaphysical game-playing can be liberating rather than confining or coercive. Nabokov writes, "It did not matter who they were. No sound, / No furtive light came from their involute abode, but there they were, aloof and mute, / Playing a game of worlds, promoting pawns / To ivory unicorns and ebon fauns" (63). The notion of a "game of worlds" concisely expresses the convergence of metaphysics and metafiction in Nabokov's work. It also echoes Dick's semi-fictional cosmology of alternate forking universes in "If You Find this World Bad," which Sutin poetically describes as a "Gnostic computer chess game" (Divine Invasions 251). This metaphor in turn resembles Culiano's concept of heresy and Gnosticism as a game of binary forking paths, resembling board games such as chess (239-48).
[li] Nabokov lists all of these appearances of the motif in his preface, except for the "chalked outlines" of the ghostly figures, perhaps in order to reward the reader's own participation in the linkage of otherworldly intimations (xiv-xv).
[lii] Nabokov attacks the reductive psychoanalytic, literary, and pedagogical use of symbols in "Rowe's Symbols" (Strong Opinions 304-7).
[liii] Moore argues that the process of making connections between disparate discourses and entities is the aim not only of the characters' efforts to comprehend their worlds but also an interpretative enterprise that Pynchon encourages readers to follow:

> Most generally, the reader of Gravity's Rainbow must learn to see the quasi-magical, part-hallucinatory web of interconnections, variously familiar, obscure, farfetched and hitherto

unthought-of, among all these images, signs, and omens; he must learn many specific translations, some reductive parodies of others, of the narrator's assertion that 'everything is connected, everything in the Creation' [703]. (28)

Chapter Three: Heretical Reading and Hypertext Pedagogy

Heretical reading has applications in the pedagogical use of technology, especially in the form of electronic textuality called hypertext. The use of this reading method within the classroom offers a response to a professional dilemma faced by teachers of English literature at the college level. While graduate students seeking to become professors are expected to have a specific area of literary expertise, little theorization exists of how to apply their complex, specialized knowledge to the more general, introductory pedagogical needs of students. There is currently no clear answer to this question within the profession of literary studies, and many professors address the problem by focusing on issues of selection. In other words, they attempt over the years to determine how much of their knowledge can be absorbed by students, usually by selecting a limited number of texts that can be manageably taught to undergraduates at various levels. This solution is not ideal, since it shifts emphasis away from the development of interpretative skills, the aspect of disciplinary knowledge most central to the professor's achievement and potentially most valuable to the student.

In order to respond to this professional dilemma of adapting one's specialty to the classroom while remaining focused on interpretation, one could learn to apply a method of reading a group of texts to one's pedagogy. My own area of specialty is postmodern American fiction, and I have developed a method of interpreting a particular set of texts by Pynchon, Nabokov, and Dick. The first part of this method, explained in chapters one and two, involves paying close attention to these texts' use of the Gnostic worldview to

achieve a set of narrative and representational aims. These goals involve an architectonic series of forms of freedom proscribed by the very poststructuralist formulations of postmodernity that are usually used to interpret these novels. Each of the steps in the question and process of freedom opens the possibility for the next, culminating in choice conceived navigationally rather than hierarchically. The evidence for the novels' use of Gnosticism is primarily textual, but the first part of the method of reading also demonstrates that such a strategy is plausibly within the intentions of the authors. However, the decision to read these novels heretically is itself a choice involving my own selfhood and predispositions as a reader.

This aspect of heretical reading can best be clarified by developing a way to apply it within the classroom. The method of reading can have pedagogical implications because postmodern novels conceptualize transcendent presence not as a retreat to a *pleroma* but as the intrusion of liberating sparks into the world. Because these sparks enter the everyday world of history and constraint, they can inspire emancipatory political action. "Political" is used here its broadest possible sense as "involved in practice" as opposed to purely speculative or contemplative knowledge. For a teacher of literature, the most realistic arena for political action is the classroom, and technological pedagogy is a particularly relevant field of emancipatory effort for a teacher of postmodern novels in the early twenty-first century. Not only is postmodern literature often directly concerned with technology, but many university classrooms are beginning to be equipped with computers in order to assist in teaching. "Technology" etymologically breaks down into the "logos" or words about a "techne" (a practice or

skill), suggesting its suitability for bridging the two worlds of speculative literary study and practical classroom activity.[liv] Most theorists and practitioners of technological pedagogy regard it as emancipatory and empowering for students, since it provides them with tools for taking the initiative in their own learning.

The emancipatory technology best suited for the pedagogical application of heretical reading is hypertext. Hypertext theorists seek to enable freedom through reader choice, a goal that is reflected in the definitions of hypertext by its main proponents. Ted Nelson coined the word "hypertext" in 1965 and defined it most clearly in his book Literary Machines: "by 'hypertext' I mean *non-sequential writing*—text that branches and allows choices to the reader, best read at an interactive screen. As popularly conceived, this is a series of text chunks connected by links which offer the reader different pathways" (0/2). Other definitions of hypertext by its major theorists corroborate this interest in choice as well as its spatial expression in figures of "forking," "branching," and "linkage." In Hypertext 2.0, Landow cites Nelson's definition and adds his own spatial gloss: "*Hypertext*, as the term is used in this work, denotes text composed of blocks of text—what Barthes terms a lexia—and the electronic links that join them" (3). Michael Joyce, in Of Two Minds: Hypertext Pedagogy and Poetics defines hypertext as "reading and writing electronically in an order you choose; whether among choices represented for you by the writer or by your discovery of the topographic (sensual) organization of the text. Your choices, not the author's representations or the initial topography, constitute the current state of the text" (114).

Like heretical reading, hypertext develops directly out of the tradition of experimental fiction that can be read in multiple orders and that therefore allows for reader choice. When attempting to explain hypertext, theorists sometimes have recourse to the series of children's books from the 1980's known as "Choose Your Own Adventure." [lv] These narratives invite readers to choose alternative paths through the story by turning to different pages depending on their narrative interests. For example, an episode might end by presenting the reader with a juncture such as "If you want to fight the dragon, turn to page 100. If you would prefer to run away, turn to page 55." After "Choose Your Own Adventure" and its multiple spin-offs, hypertext theorists usually cite postmodern experimental metafictions that share similar traits. These include Vladimir Nabokov's Pale Fire, in which readers move alternately between and among the lines of a poem by the imaginary author John Shade and the extravagant commentary by a mad scholar named Kinbote.[lvi] Other often-cited proto-hypertextual fictions include Milorad Pavić's Dictionary of the Khazars and Julio Cortázar's Hopscotch.[lvii] Indeed, hypertext has even deeper roots in a tradition of postmodern fiction that includes works which do not necessarily adopt the "Choose Your Own Adventure" format but nevertheless exhibit proto-hypertextual traits. For example, the novels of Thomas Pynchon are proto-hypertextual because they comprise non-linear networks of proliferating, interconnected, and polymathic references. As Michael Joyce observes in Of Two Minds: Hypertext Pedagogy and Poetics, Stuart Moulthrop's pioneering creative and theoretical applications of hypertext were heavily influenced by his studies as a Pynchon critic (86).

While the goals of hypertext theorists often involve freedom and derive from postmodern fiction, these theorists usually understand their work in terms of poststructuralist theory. Thus, Landow subtitles Hypertext 2.0 as "The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology," and he argues that the techniques of hypertext and the concepts of the major poststructuralist theorists are deeply intertwined with one another (2). He supports this claim with a variety of parallels between hypertext and the work of Derrida and Barthes, Foucault, Bakhtin, and Deleuze and Guattari (33-34, 37-38, 44, 36, 38-43). Similarly, in "You Say You Want a Revolution?: Hypertext and the Laws of Media," Stuart Moulthrop theorizes the goals of hypertext as political empowerment, which he conceptualizes in terms derived from poststructuralist thinkers and media theorists such as Roland Barthes, Frederic Jameson, and Marshall McLuhan (Barthes 5, Jameson 38, McLuhan passim). While Moulthrop critiques the potential limitations of Baudrillard's "hyperreality" for describing the politically empowering ends of hypertext, he nevertheless assumes that poststructuralist versions of political empowerment should in fact be the medium's aim (1). Like the work of Landow and Moulthrop, Jay Bolter's Writing Space also acknowledges the relevance of poststructuralist theory to hypertext. However, Bolter adds a paradoxical challenge to this model by suggesting that hypertext may fit the deconstructionist descriptions of textuality so well that these theories offer only superficial insights into the medium. He writes, "For the traditional reader electronic writing offers little comfort: it will in fact confirm much of what the deconstructionists and others have been saying about the instability of the text and decreasing authority of the author. Yet electronic writing will

at the same time take much of the sting out of deconstruction. As it restores a theoretical innocence to the making of literary texts, electronic writing will require a simpler, more positive literary theory" (147). While the application of heretical reading to hypertext is neither "simpler" nor more "innocent" than poststructuralism, this method does respond to Bolter's call for a "more positive" approach to hypertext.

My method of reading allows one to conceptualize hypertextuality in ways that are heretical to the assumptions of poststructuralism. Some pedagogical concepts in my approach to hypertext derive from Gnosticism, though heretical reading is not primarily the attempt to see technological pedagogy as Gnostic. Rather, heretical reading advances a competing vision of hypertext that explores technology as a means of putting into practice the four possibilities of freedom that I previously discussed in relation to the texts of Pynchon, Nabokov, and Dick. These possibilities include freedom as presence and transcendence, as liberating knowledge, as a spirituality constituting self-consciousness, and as choice conceived navigationally rather than hierarchically. Indeed, a strategy for implementing heretical reading within the classroom through hypertext can be advanced in a way that parallels the steps of heretical reading as enacted within postmodern texts.

Disorientation, Disquieting Structures, and Exploratory Hypertext

Hypertext can first of all provide a means of constructing labyrinthine pedagogical environments that expose students to disorientation in order to encourage them to develop navigational skills among a network of complex textual information. These spaces can be used to allow the student to negotiate interpretative indeterminacy so

that an original, insightful, and heretical choice can be made. Such pedagogical environments are similar to the "disquieting structure" of Pynchon's Counterforce Hell and to the similar fictional spaces throughout the work of Nabokov and Dick, such as Cincinnatus' prison or the vision of the universe as a pedagogical labyrinth described by Mini in VALIS (Gravity's Rainbow 537, Invitation to a Beheading 77, VALIS 185-86 and see chapter one above). Pynchon's "Counterforce Hell" is a pedagogical maze, whose winding corridors initiate former servants of the System into the Counterforce through a series of "orientation" devices. These devices involve first recognizing one's lostness within a space of interlocking power relations in order to begin "the Nature of Freedom drill" (541). Similarly, Cincinnatus' prison constitutes a labyrinth of involuted passageways that lead back with seeming inevitability to his own cell, indirectly forcing him to seek an alternate spiritual route toward freedom. Finally, the inventor Mini in VALIS informs Horselover Fat that "we are in a living maze and not in a world at all" and further explains that the cosmos was designed as a pedagogical space which a race of spiritual beings living at Crete built to test their own abilities to escape it into a higher freedom (185-186).

Just as postmodern authors metafictionally represent their own novels as labyrinthine spaces with pedagogical purposes, so hypertext is often understood in spatial terms involving "navigation" through disorienting spaces. Theorists of the medium have expressed concerns about the so-called "navigation problem" that the user might become lost in a maze of disorienting links (Landow 115-16). However, the "navigation problem" can be aesthetically and pedagogically productive, as both Mark Bernstein and

Landow have noted (Bernstein 293-95). Landow eloquently describes the potential pedagogical usefulness of navigational disorientation within art and scholarship, with particular emphasis on avant-garde literature. He writes, "Readers of literature in fact often describe the experience here presented as disorientation as pleasurable, even exciting, and some forms of literature, particularly those that emphasize either allegory or stylistic and narrative experimentation, rely on disorienting the reader as a primary effect" (117-18). Landow draws upon the work of Morse Peckham, who argues in Man's Rage for Chaos that one of the primary functions of art is to allow a space for the experience of fictional "disorientation" in order to prepare readers for similar experiences in real life situations (117-18). Landow notes the positive valorization of aesthetic disorientation in the artistic practice and scholarship of modernism and postmodernism, and he repeatedly discusses the possibility that such effects might be "liberating." These ideas converge in Landow's analytical summary of Robert Coover, whom Landow claims "makes quite clear the relations between disorientation, hypertext, and the traditions of the avant-garde when he describes the way hypertext fiction promises to fulfill the liberating functions of the experimental tradition in fiction" (118). Coover specifically envisions hypertext as a means toward the "freedom from the tyranny of the line" sought in non-linear fiction but much more attainable through technology. Landow summarizes Coover's goal as "disorienting freedom," and this is the first aim of using technology and pedagogy in heretical reading (Coover "The End of Books," quoted in Landow 118).

In corroboration of Landow's ambition for navigational freedom, Pierre Lévy also focuses upon issues of navigation and information transmission in his book Collective

Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace. Lévy is a theorist of cyberculture identified by both his admirers and opponents as having affinities with Gnosticism.[lviii] He describes the gradual emergence of a "knowledge space" comprised of interconnected multimedia and hypertext environments for storing information and allowing individuals to navigate and modify this information in a way that advances collective knowledge. Lévy recognizes that one of the crucial problems of such a complex space would be the solution of the "navigation problem." Thus, he declares that "the prosperity of a nation, geographical region, business, or individual depends on their ability to navigate the knowledge space" (1). For Lévy, as for most hypertext theorists, the problem of navigation is intimately related to the difficulties of selecting and connecting information meaningfully despite the potential for overwhelming confusion that can result from vast quantities of data. Thus, he writes that "the number of messages in circulation has never been as great as it is now, but we have few instruments to filter the pertinent data, make connections on the basis of significations and needs that are still subjective, or orient ourselves within the flux of information" (9). He envisions this challenge as an invitation to what he eloquently refers to as "the art and architecture of cyberspace," which involve "acquiring the institutional, technical, and conceptual instruments needed to make information navigable, so that each of us is able to orient ourselves and recognize others on the basis of mutual interests, abilities, projects, means, and identities within this new space" (9-10). Yet, despite an interest in the navigation of an elaborately designed cyberspace, Lévy decries the dangers of a restrictively disordered "commodity space" that can accompany hypertext when controlled by "the military-

industrial-media-university complex" (212-14). Instead, he imagines the knowledge space as an intricate and liberating "white labyrinth," as opposed to the "black labyrinth" of capitalist media manipulation (253-54). Lévy declares that "instead of reinforcing the fortresses of power, we must refine the architecture of cyberspace, the ultimate labyrinth" (255). [lix]

In Cybertext, Espen Aarseth beautifully evokes similar "spatiodynamic" models of textuality and cyberspace, though he wrongly suggests that theorists have misapplied them to literary narratives. Aarseth describes "the idea of a narrative text as a labyrinth, a game, or an imaginary world, in which the reader can explore at will, get lost, discover secret paths, play around, follow the rules, and so on" (3). However, he quickly expresses harsh critiques of what he perceives as the misapplication of these metaphors in literary criticism:

> The problem with these powerful metaphors, when they begin to affect the critic's perspective and judgment, is that they enable a systematic misrepresentation of the relationship between narrative text and reader; a spatiodynamic fallacy where the narrative is not perceived as a presentation of a world but rather as that world itself. (3-4)

According to Aarseth, narratives render readers "powerless" except for what he dismisses as the "trivial" power of interpretation, whereas cybertexts allow the reader to literally shape the story (4). Aarseth's claims result from an overly literal textual "typology" that rigidly separates most literary texts and hypertexts from what he calls "cybertexts," including computer games and Multi-User Domains Object Oriented (MOO's). Contrary

to Aarseth's assertion, interpretation of experimental fiction itself constitutes participation in that it significantly alters the reader's experience of the text, if not its actual structure. Thus, the labyrinthine spaces described within these novels metafictionally represent the narratives' own experiential status as games, spaces, and labyrinths. Aarseth's suggests that a print book is more non-linear than a hypertext because a reader can browse at will through a codex book but has only limited control of her navigation through a hyperfiction (63). The same emphasis on structure without consideration of the imaginative experience of a work of literature leads Aarseth to place Moby-Dick, a radically experimental novel with some non-linear proto-hypertextual characteristics, on a corner of his graph that indicates minimal "cybertextuality" (63). This problem results from an excessively quantitative rather than qualitatitive analysis of works of literature. Of course a codex book can be browsed in any order, but that does not mean that the narrative will be intelligible or aesthetically pleasing. Only certain codex books can be read in a non-linear fashion because they have been designed with this usage in mind. These books are proto-hypertextual, and the structural and experiential features that they share with hypertext derive from precisely the liberating choices that they offer. These interpretative choices can be experienced as "spatio-dynamic," and they radically alter the reader's perception of the text in a way that is more rather than less significant than the trivial decisions that a computer game allows. In applications of heretical reading to technological pedagogy, the disquieting structures available through a hypertext (or even potentially a MOO or computer game) should imitate the metafictional, interpretative labyrinths of a proto-hypertextual fiction.

In practical terms, these "disquieting structures" will first amount to what Joyce calls "exploratory" hypertexts, used for the presentation of educational materials, rather than "constructive" hypertexts that the students themselves build (41-42). As Joyce explains:

> By exploratory use, I mean to describe the increasingly familiar use of hypertext as a delivery or presentational technology, as Guide and Hypercard are currently most often used. Exploratory hypertexts encourage and enable an audience (*users* and *readers* are inadequate terms here) to control the transformation of a body of information to meet its needs and interests. This transformation should include a capability to create, change, and recover particular encounters with the body of knowledge, maintaining these encounters as versions of the material, i.e. trails, paths, webs, notebooks, etc.. (41)

Joyce emphasizes the "navigational capabilities" of exploratory hypertext, which he sees as a technological enactment of human tendencies toward modeling cognition spatially through "our intuitive mapping of thought in physical space" (41, 159). He thus imagines an application of the formal structures of hyperfiction to hypertext pedagogy, with an emphasis on choice. He explains:

> As a first step toward a hypertext for the humanities, we might imagine something very much like hyperfiction in conception or at least in its branching, convinced that the mix of seamless, default branches, yields, and patterned browsing that characterizes them is something like the right model for interactive texts in any domain, and especially for the kinds of choice-driven modules we are discussing.

> [. . .] Unlike most hyperfictions, however, the humanities modules would generate a model of the students [sic] encounter with the structure of thought. (155)

This first step in heretical reading will involve web sites that structurally represent and enact various possible interpretations of a given novel. While Joyce envisions exploratory hypertexts as taking place within programs such as the software system he co-authored with Jay Bolter called "Storyspace," the most practical format for exploratory hypertext in 2005 is the World Wide Web. These web sites will grow directly out of an understanding of the textuality of proto-hypertextual experimental novels. The sites will highlight the choices offered by the authors of these novels and the invitations to be heretical that they present through interpretative branchings and forkings. For example, a website on The Crying of Lot 49 might center around the interpretative crossroads offered by Pynchon near the conclusion of the novel, in which Oedipa finds herself faced with four "symmetrical" choices about the ontological status of the Tristero (171).[lx] In the conclusion of this deeply indeterminate novel, Oedipa lyrically contemplates four possible theories about the status of her experiences with the Tristero that also represent four interpretations available to the reader. Pynchon writes:

> Either way, they'll call it paranoia. They. Either you have stumbled indeed, without the aid of LSD or other indole alkaloids, onto a secret richness or concealed density of dream; onto a network by which X number of Americans are truly communicating whilst reserving their lies, recitations of routine, arid betrayals of spiritual poverty, for the official government delivery system; maybe

> even onto a real alternative to the exitlessness, to the absence of surprise to life, that harrows the head of everybody American you know, and you too, sweetie. Or you are hallucinating it. Or a plot has been mounted against you, so expensive and elaborate, involving items like the forging of stamps and ancient books, constant surveillance of your movements, planting of post horn images all over San Francisco, bribing of librarians, hiring of professional actors and Pierce Inverarity only knows what-all besides, all financed out of the estate in a way either too secret or too involved for your non-legal mind to know about even though you are co-executor, so labyrinthine that it must have meaning beyond just a practical joke. Or you are fantasizing some such plot, in which case you are a nut, Oedipa, out of your skull. (CL49 170)

Pynchon describes these meditations as a moment of decision: "Those, now that she was looking at them, she saw to be the alternatives. Those symmetrical four. She didn't like any of them, but hoped she was mentally ill" (171). This description of a "symmetrical" fourfold choice can be represented graphically as a crossroads, with the real and the hallucinatory interpretations on opposite ends of two intersecting lines. The phrase "those symmetrical four" would be marked up as a hypertext link leading to a page that summarizes the four possible interpretations, each of which would have its own link. See figure below.

These four options involve four major interpretations of the novel:

1. The Tristero is real.
2. The Tristero is a hallucination.
3. The Tristero is an elaborate plot/practical joke.

4. The elaborate plot/practical joke is a hallucination.

Each interpretation is plausible and could be argued through linking together various details and passages supporting this interpretation. One option for reading would be to allow all four interpretations to co-exist ambiguously in a field of interpretative indeterminacy. While a background of indeterminacy must be acknowledged, much of the aesthetic interest of the novel stems from its invitation to choose an interpretation.

By clicking on any of the above links, one would arrive at a page that describes what details would be linked together in order to support each interpretation. For example, the page for interpretation # 1 would read:

Possible Interpretation #1: The Tristero is Real

This interpretation would involve gathering the references to the Tristero which seem genuine because they are directly experienced by Oedipa in a reliable way, because other reliable characters acknowledge them, because they are so outlandish that they could not have been staged, or because they have an aura of the numinous (either sacred or demonic) that suggests that they partake of a transcendental reality.
Examples:

These web pages could eventually be developed into intricate networks of possible interpretations, based on the two main structures of hypertext: "branching" and "linking."[lxi] Both structures entail the formation and navigation of a network of text and interpretation. To fulfill the requirements of heretical reading, these web sites must be interpretative rather than merely informational, as opposed to many existing literary sites that are primarily annotative archives of contextual material. In Radiant Textuality, Jerome McGann critiques the tendency of scholarly web sites to be strictly informational and suggests the need for a shift to interpretation. He writes:

> In this respect the work rarely engages those questions about interpretation and self-aware reflection that are the central concerns for most humanities scholars and educators. [. . .] But *the general field of humanities education and scholarship will not take the use of digital technology seriously until one demonstrates how its tools improve the ways we explore and explain aesthetic works—until, that is, they expand our interpretational procedures*. (xii, italics in original)

Even one of the best resources about experimental fiction on the internet, The Modern Word, primarily collects information on its authors rather than offering interpretations of them. A sub-section of this site, "The Libyrinth," contains excellent pages on Pynchon, Borges, and many other modern and postmodern authors, and this site's title suggests its editor's keen and imaginative awareness of the "spatiodynamic" experience of postmodern fiction. The page on Pynchon, "Spermatikos Logos," abounds in metafictional quotations from his work that highlight the intricate structural designs of his fictions (as well as the mystical and Gnostic resonances of his vision).[lxii] The beautiful multimedia images of this site and its collection of Pynchon's rare uncollected writings make it a superb introduction to the context of his works. Yet, the site itself is relatively simple and non-interpretative in its structure, consisting of a navigational bar with links to various sections (such as "works," "criticism," and "quotations").

A Pynchon site designed to teach heretical reading would instead enact through its own structure the hypertextual, labyrinthine proliferation of interpretative pathways created by Pynchon's own texts. Such a web site would emphasize that the choice to

link one passage to another, or to link a passage to a multimedia page, has interpretative consequences. By providing links not only to contextual material or critical articles but to multiple and specific interpretative possibilities associated with a given passage, the site would demonstrate that any lexia can be interpreted in more than one way and that these interpretations always involve a decision on the part of the critic. The site would form an interpretative network or a "garden of forking paths," to use the Borgesian image often applied to hypertext works.[lxiii] Such a site would concur to a limited extent with the principles of indeterminacy and intertextuality often celebrated in poststructuralist descriptions of hypertext, such as those by Landow.[lxiv]

However, in opposition to poststructuralist approaches to hypertext, heretical reading asserts that the existence of a network is not in itself liberating. Landow describes hypertext as the embodiment of various poststructuralist networks, such as a Derridaean differential network or a Barthesian semiotic web. He characterizes such a network as inherently emancipatory through its breaking down of hegemonic structures that privilege linearity over non-linearity and center over margin (33-48). Yet, there is nothing inherently liberating about navigating a network of signs in which meaning is infinitely deferred because of the self-referential tendencies of the signifiers, anymore than there is in wandering an exitless labyrinth. Commitment to a path is a crucial element of freedom, which is otherwise a reductively anti-hermeneutic tendency to travel aimlessly through a network, noting all paths and choosing none. Freedom consists of an awareness that multiple paths exist based on the choices taken at various interpretative junctures, combined with a commitment to a particular interpretative path. For a student

to develop a coherent and persuasive interpretative argument, they should choose a path through this network in response to intimations of presence and transcendence. These intimations are “sparks” in the Gnostic terminology: nodes of particular aesthetic radiance and semantic significance that guide the formation of an interpretation.

Sparks, Intimations of Transcendent Presence, and Lexia in Hypertext

Insightful and original student essays emerge from encountering "sparks" within the text in the form of non-totalizing intimations of transcendence and presence. The image of the sparks is particularly appropriate to difficult postmodern texts, which often comprise a background of bleakness, confusion, and indeterminacy through which are scattered passages of particular richness, significance, and even metaphorical "radiance." In hypertext terms, these are the "lexia" or nodes from which multiple interpretations radiate. As Landow explains, a "lexia" refers to one of the fragments or "blocks" of text that constitute a hypertext when connected by links (3). Hypertext places an emphasis on lexia rather than on the text as an organic whole, since the nonlinear structure of hypertext means that "the text appears to fragment, to atomize, into constituent elements (into lexias or blocks of text); and these reading units take on a life of their own as they become more self-contained, because they become less dependent on what comes before or after in a linear succession" (64). The word "lexia" is derived from Barthes, who used it to analyze any text as a web of arbitrary semiotic relationships in which signs refer only to other signs through socially constructed cultural conventions. Landow conceptualizes hypertextual networks in terms taken from Barthes as well as other poststructuralist theorists such as Foucault, Bakhtin, Derrida, and Deleuze and Guattari (33, 38).

According to Landow, these theorists encourage a view of hypertext as "open," "intertextual," "multivocal," and "decentered" (33-42). In each of Landow's descriptions of hypertext, lexia always link to other texts, voices, signs, and traces, but never to reality itself.

Heretical reading contests this view of hypertext by suggesting that certain lexia function as intimations of presence and transcendence. These sparks are intimations of presence because they suggest to the interpreter that there is something real and valuable about particular sections of the text that refer not only to other signs but to possibilities in the world itself. They are intimations of transcendence because they are moments in which the text seems to gesture toward the numinous, and they therefore grant faint suggestions of inspiration to the interpreter without causing her to intolerantly disregard other possible interpretations. Heretical reading does not require that the students' interpretations deal explicitly with transcendence in the religious sense, but it insists that these possibilities remain open as viable interpretative options. More importantly, heretical reading asserts the right of students to experience the generative process of their own essays as a form of the transcendent, rather than as a mere socially constructed performance for a particular classroom situation.

The image of the sparks is useful pedagogically because it allows for the possibility of non-totalizing and fragmentary enclaves of meaning without encouraging totalizing interpretations that are incompatible with hypertext. These sparks are non-totalizing in the sense that they differ from person to person, depending on the interpretative predisposition and their resulting goals in reading. In other words, the

sparks need not be passages or lexia that allude to Gnosticism, spirituality, or mysticism. Individual students may find intimations of reality or transcendence in passages dealing with any number of subject areas not usually associated with Gnosticism, such as Marxist representations of class struggle or feminist depictions of empowered women. The importance of a spark is not its mystical content, but that it stands out against the background of the text as being of particular value, reality, or transcendence. Recognizing lexia as sparks does not allow for a return to the formalist view of texts as organic wholes in which all elements support one unified interpretation. Acknowledgement of the sparks also avoids the equally reductive and totalizing anti-hermeneutic refusal to emphasize some details over others or to link them into a meaningful argument. Successful interpretations of difficult postmodern texts involve not the anti-hermeneutic refusal to select some details rather than others, but rather the location and linkage of particularly radiant passages.[lxv]

My own reading of Pynchon, Nabokov, and Dick developed out of a response to sparks of presence and transcendence within these texts, which operated as the generative nodes from which the rest of the interpretation developed. These readings began when I came upon a single paragraph in Harold Bloom's introductory essay to Thomas Pynchon which offers a Gnostic reading of Gravity's Rainbow. This passage was immensely suggestive and fascinating to me because it suggested an entirely new way to view the postmodern literature in which I was already immersed. In Gnostic terms, it was a spark. I soon discovered that while Bloom had written extensively on Gnosticism, interpretation, and literature, he had not analyzed most of the direct references to

Gnosticism in Gravity's Rainbow. I set out to do so, locating these passages and pondering how they linked together interpretatively. I was aware as I did this that these references were taking place against a background of what might be more conventionally considered as postmodern themes, such as the deconstruction of oppressive ideological structures. Nevertheless, the Gnostic references and related descriptions that utilized Gnostic imagery could be linked together to form an argument about freedom as a question and a process. Heretical reading began with the intimations of certain passages of particular radiant richness and intensity within the texts of Pynchon, Nabokov, and Dick. These passages not only utilized the imagery of sparks dispersed through a *kenoma*, or empty cosmos, but they actually instantiated the hermeneutic equivalent of sparks within these highly indeterminate texts.

McGann theorizes the radiance of these sparks in relation to hypertext when he coins the term "radiant textuality" to discuss "literature after the world wide web" and when he declares that "textuality *as such* operates as a radiant and decentered structure" (Radiant Textuality, italics in original 25). McGann never defines "radiant," though he associates this quality with the "open and interactive" aspects of poetic textuality, created by the imaginative suggestiveness of literary works that generates interpretations. His use of light imagery suggests intimations of transcendence, an interpretation that is justified by his background in Romanticism and work with hypertext archives of Rossetti. Indeed, McGann argues that a text is a "transcendental object," and he suggests that multimedia hypertexts have the potential to bring about a secularized "resurrection" of

"once-sacred models of communication," such as medieval cathedrals and ancient temples (Radiant Textuality xiii).

While all of the primary texts discussed in chapters one and two use spark imagery in a meta-representational and meta-hermeneutic manner, Dick offers the most vivid and direct prefiguration of hypertextuality and its relationship to the spark. In the course of The Divine Invasion, he describes a hologram-based, computerized Torah whose textuality prefigures both Joyce's descriptions of "constructive" hypertext as well as the reader response aspects of heretical reading (70, see chapter two above). Dick envisions this hypertextual, multimedia Torah as an "open hologram" because "new information could be fed into it," much as Joyce argues that students can add links to a constructive hypertext environment (70). This approach to a sacred text is threatening to the authorities of Dick's fictional world because it invites opportunities for reader response similar to those celebrated by hypertext theorists.[lxvi] Thus, Dick explains that the church forbids this device because by learning to operate the hologramatic machine "you entered into a dialogue with Scripture" (71). Later in the novel, the mystic Elias explains that the deepest form of his version of kabbalistic exegesis involves studying the light "wrapped up within the heart of the Torah. This was an inexhaustible light, related to the divine sparks which the Gnostics had believed in, the fragments of the Godhead which were now scattered throughout Creation" (98). Thus, the sparks refer not just to metaphysical entities exiled in an empty cosmos, but interpretative nodes dispersed at various localized points throughout an indeterminate text. Just as the Gnostics called the

metaphysical awareness of these sparks *gnosis*, so the recognition and usage of textual sparks constitutes a form of liberating interpretative knowledge.

Hypertext and Liberating Knowledge

Because of the possibility of presence within hypertext, liberating knowledge sought by heretical reading can also be explored in technological approaches to pedagogy. *Gnosis* can take two forms in hypertext, one of which has been eloquently explored by Stuart Moulthrop in his concept of "paragnosis" as discussed in "You Say You Want a Revolution?: Hypertext and the Laws of Media." Moulthrop derives this idea from Pynchon's descriptions of "creative paranoia" as "the discovery that *everything is connected*" (Gravity's Rainbow 703, italics in original; see chapter two above). Moulthrop suggests that hypertext can induce a healthy and useful sense of paranoia about the power exercised by authors over readers through the construction of texts. He argues that the very claims to agency and freedom advanced by hypertext theoreticians and seemingly inherent in the medium can paradoxically emphasize the inevitable restrictions involved in structuring such a text. As Moulthrop explains, "The text gestures toward openness—*what options can you imagine?*—but then it forecloses: some options are available but not others, and someone clearly has done the defining." In other words, an author places links that constrain the number of possible choices in a particularly visible way. Moulthrop writes that paragnosis derives from "the root sense of paranoia, a parallel or parallax gnosis," which "happens to be a handy way to conceive of the meta-sense of pattern recognition that hypertext serves to enhance."[lxvii] In keeping with a devoted Pynchon scholar's fear of technocratic power elites, Moulthrop then

emphasizes that hypertextual pattern recognition is not only a skill involving aesthetic appreciation, but that it facilitates an active, skeptical resistance to deceptive geopolitical uses of technology. While Moulthrop's concept of paragnosis is insightful, its pedagogical utility is limited by its negative focus on the exposure of constraining power. The recognition of power can partially liberate a student from hegemonic control but cannot provide a tool for asserting positive knowledge claims. A knowledge based only upon the awareness of oppressive ideological systems and the attempt to annihilate them by recognizing their constructedness is at most half of *gnosis*. Moreover, it is not a basis upon which to write an argumentative essay, which is the primary aim of technological pedagogy in the humanities and especially literary studies.

Teaching students to write essays with hypertext requires a form of *gnosis* involving both the intimations of presence and transcendence, as well as the organizational and research skills to select the relevant information needed to support these intimations argumentatively. As Landow explains, Vannevar Bush first defined what were later named hypertext technologies as solutions to the problem of "information retrieval," which he specifically dubbed "the matter of selection" (Landow 7). Bush referred to the problem of how to access the particular information needed for a given scholarly purpose within a vast database. He argued that hypertext technologies could facilitate this access and selection because they organize information by association and allow for quick searches (7-10). Contemporary students of the humanities face a different but related problem of selection, which involves choosing and arranging relevant facts in order to form a persuasive argument.

The term "*gnosis*" provides a way to connect the generation of essays through intimations of presence and transcendence to the problems of information location and selection associated with structuring arguments. In other words, *gnosis* describes the relationship between the rhetorical canon of invention involved in conceiving an interpretative essay topic and the selective or navigational abilities that enable one to construct a coherent essay. As noted in chapter two, Bloom suggests a nexus between *gnosis* and information theory (American Religion 30). In terms of essay composition, intimations of presence and transcendence constitute a form of "information" that allows one to make the initial choice or "meta-choice" to write an essay. This choice occurs prior to the particular selection and arrangement of factual information, such as quotations and contextual background about an author and text. This initial choice or "invention" of a topic requires imagination as well as intellectual rigor, and it provides a way out of the *aporia* of indeterminacy that is created by multiple conflicting interpretations that cannot be decided solely on the basis of textual evidence.

The concept of *aporia* serves a similar function in the vocabulary of Gnosticism and hypertext. According to Pagels, this word means "confusion" and literally denotes "'roadlessness,' not knowing where to go" in ancient Greek (The Gnostic Gospels 144). In the vocabulary of deconstruction, *aporia* is a condition of interpretative undecidability derived from the inevitable internal self-contradictions associated with the rhetorically constructed status of any utterance. In Paul de Man's version of deconstruction, *aporia* is the ultimate result of any close reading of a linguistic statement, which is always also a rhetorically constructed argument. Thus, de Man writes in Allegories of Reading that

"Rhetoric is a *text* in that it allows for two incompatible, mutually self-destructive points of view, and therefore puts an insurmountable obstacle in the way of any reading or understanding" (131). In contrast, Pagels explains that the Gnostics regarded *aporia* as only one component of the "experiential beginning" of a spiritual search that can lead to *gnosis* (144). The structure of this search resembles Aarseth's rhetorical analysis of "aporia and epiphany" as the most important rhetorical "figures" of hypertext. Aarseth takes the *aporia* as a paradigmatic literary effect of hypertext fictions, which he represents as characterized by a high degree of difficulty in locating the links that lead to meaningful narrative sequences. Aarseth argues that "this kind of impasse is a main trope of *Afternoon*'s literary machine: an aporia in a very literal sense. [. . .] Aporia here becomes a trope, an absent pièce de résistance rather than the usual transcendental resistance of the (absent) meaning of a difficult passage" (91). Aarseth thus describes narrative frustration in explicitly spatial terms of not being able to locate a path, which he suggests through the phrase "aporia in a very literal sense." At the same time, he suggests that in hypertext there can be a "complementary" trope called "the epiphany." He explains:

> This is the sudden revelation that replaces the aporia, a seeming detail with an unexpected, salvaging effect: the link out. The hypertext epiphany, unlike James Joyce's 'sudden spiritual manifestation' [Abrams 1981, 54], is immanent: a planned construct rather than an unplanned contingency. Together, this pair of master tropes constitutes the dynamic of hypertext discourse: the dialectic between searching and finding typical of games in general. The aporia-epiphany

> pair is thus not a narrative structure but constitutes a more fundamental layer of human experience, from which narratives are spun. (92)

While Aarseth attempts to distance himself from Joyce's modernist appropriation of the epiphany as well as Abrams' romanticist description of it, the concept can be re-sacralized through the terminology of *gnosis*. In texts and hypertexts that convey intimations of transcendence, the epiphany can be legitimately discussed as a moment of spontaneous techgnostic spirituality rather than an "immanent" "planned construct."

Gnosis as a "link out" of *aporia* is a powerful metaphor for an experience of composition that is often difficult to articulate but central to the process of invention. While Aarseth applies his analysis primarily to the reading of hypertext fictions, the same tropes can also be used to analyze the composition of analytic essays in hypertext. Writers of interpretative essays, especially analyses of difficult and indeterminate postmodern works, often find themselves confronted with *aporias* in which the choice of an interpretation strictly on the basis of textual evidence is rendered problematic by the tendency of the text to deconstruct itself. While one option would be to allow all possible interpretations to co-exist in a field of indeterminacy, this abdication of interpretative choice has a tendency to lead to lackluster argumentation and an absence of enthusiasm on the part of the writer. A dispassionate catalog of all interpretative possibilities may be a useful intellectual exercise, but it is not by itself a generative source of argumentative engagement. In my own writing, I often find that I am most productive when I have weighed a spectrum of possible interpretations, confronted uneasily their indeterminacy, and then made an interpretative choice. This choice is, of course, still based upon all the

formalist criteria of evidence for a convincing reading, such as textual evidence and contextual investigation of authorial intention. However, because deconstruction suggests that all interpretations can be reduced to *aporia* by the self-contradictory tendencies of language itself, interpretative choice cannot be based solely on formalist criteria. Rather than acceding to utter indeterminacy, a choice results from a form of knowledge that can be experienced but not fully articulated along rational grounds. This is the hermeneutic equivalent of *gnosis*, which stems from intimations of presence and transcendence. These intimations are non-totalizing "sparks" in that they do not provide an unassailable foundation upon which an interpretation can rest, but rather the impulse and energy needed to generate an argument.

Derrida offers a powerful analogy to this experience of the passage out of *aporia* through *gnosis* in his essay "The Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority." In this essay, Derrida describes the complexities of the "moment of decision" when one attempts to follow a just course of action by interpreting a law. For Derrida, a free and just decision occurs through "aporia," which he discusses in ways that echo both Aarseth's rhetoric of hypertext and Pagels' reference to *aporia*. Derrida argues that the problems related to "deconstruction and the possibility of justice" (the theme of the conference at which he presented his essay) are

> infinite, if we may say so, in themselves, because they require the very experience of aporia that is not unrelated to what I just called the 'mystical.' When I say that they require the very experience of aporia, I mean two things. [1] As its name indicates, an experience is a traversal, something that *traverses* and travels toward

> a destination for which it finds the appropriate passage. The experience finds its way, its passage, it is possible. And in this sense it is impossible to have a full experience of aporia, that is, of something that does not allow passage. An aporia is a non-road. [. . . .] But [2] I think that there is no justice without this experience, however impossible it may be, of aporia. (16)

In order to reach the moment of decision, one must undergo the experience of the "undecidable," which Derrida describes as an *aporia* and associates with freedom:

> The undecidable is not merely the oscillation or the tension between two decisions; it is the experience of that which, though heterogenous, foreign to the order of the calculable and the rule, is still obliged—it is of obligation we must speak—to give itself up to the impossible decision, while taking account of law and rules. A decision that didn't go through the ordeal of the undecidable would not be a free decision, it would only be the programmable application or unfolding of a calculable process. (24)

While Derrida is discussing the undecidability of a legal decision, his ideas parallel the process of developing a "heretical" reading of a literary text. Such an interpretation results from the complex interaction between the "calculation" of applying rules or laws and the decision that must take these rules into account but cannot occur solely on the basis of them. A reader who attempts to argue for a new interpretative decision must base this choice largely upon "calculable" formalist maneuvers. However, when confronted with the aporia created by deconstruction, one realizes that this evidence is never sufficient to make a free interpretative decision. Derrida's "passage" out of aporia,

or the "link out" in Aarseth's hypertextual terms, is a knowledge of intimations of presence and transcendence that can be labeled *gnosis*. It is closely related to what the Romantics would have called inspiration and "imagination," yet it also constitutes a form of rigorous knowledge because it facilitates the selection and arrangement of factual information.

Hypertext and a Spirituality Constituting Self-Awareness

The knowledge of these intimations allows for a spirituality constituting awareness of selfhood, which can be fostered and enabled by pedagogical technologies like hypertext. Sparks of selfhood can respond to sparks outside of the self and within a text deeply "other" from the student's everyday subject position. The Gnostics consistently argued that the innermost selfhood was radically "other" from the material world, the body, and the mind because it was a fragment of the true God (Pagels 119, Jonas 44). Erik Davis observes in Techgnosis that this idea survives in cybercultural conceptions of selfhood, including the ambitions of cyberspace designers (102-03, 108-17). Gnosticism thus provides a vocabulary for discussing the role of the self in hypertext pedgagogy without falling back into the unexamined humanist assumptions of an autonomous, monolithic subject position with no relationship to an other. While the intentional subject has been thoroughly interrogated and deconstructed by poststructuralist theories of identity, heretical reading treats the poststructuralists' wholesale dismissal of an essential selfhood as an ideological assumption rather than a proven assertion. For a poststructuralist, the intentional subject is always the overdetermined product of system and structure. Yet, hypertext pedagogy offers one way

to temporarily break down the preconditioned responses of this system and structure, in order to allow a student to listen to their deepest identity as it is invoked by a disorienting text.

Hypertext theorists place great emphasis on the potential of their forms of textuality to empower individual readers, yet the deeply anti-individualist assumptions of poststructuralism do not allow a way to theorize who these readers are. The specter of individualism often returns in hypertext theory without explanation as to how a proscribed concept has re-entered the field of contemporary technological inquiry. For example, Landow celebrates the potential of hypertext to enable readers to choose "individual paths" as "reader-authors," yet his previous theoretical chapters suggest that hypertext enacts the "erosion of self" proclaimed by contemporary critical theory (238, 90-96). This contradiction raises the question of what "individual" self remains to choose a path and to act as a combination of reader and author. Heretical reading addresses this question by suggesting that an inner spark of selfhood responds to the sparks of presence and transcendence within the text in order to choose a path through a hypertextual network.

This emphasis on self does not mean that heretical reading can condone a narcissistic version of reader response in which the text can be made to mean anything that the reader wants it to mean. The interrogation made possible by Moulthrop's hypertextual "paragnosis" of the structures that determine the self problematizes any easy or superficial response to the text, since such a reading has been conditioned by systems of power that emerge especially visibly in hypertext. Rather, heretical reading and

hypertext can encourage a skeptically examined and rigorous reader response to a work of literature, which emerges from disorienting engagement with the text. This aspect of heretical reading calls for reader response within carefully considered limitations, such as those theorized by Umberto Eco and McGann. Michael Joyce observes that Umberto Eco's concept of the "open work" provides an accurate description of the complex interaction between the reader and a text that allows for reader participation without inviting narcissism or interpretative anarchy (139). Eco writes that "the possibilities which the work's openness makes available always work within a given field of relations." He further explains, "We can say that the *work in movement* is the possibility of numerous personal interventions, but it is not an amorphous invitation to indiscriminate participation. The invitation offers the performer the chance of oriented insertion into something which always remains the world intended by the author" (Eco The Role of the Reader 62, quoted in Joyce 138-139). Eco's "amorphous invitation to indiscriminate participation" is countered by both textual evidence and contextual indications of probable authorial intention, which constrain the possible meanings of the text. While Eco's notion of "oriented insertion" into a world refers to these limitations, it is also true that the disorienting qualities of proto-hypertexts and hypertexts allow for the reader to encounter his selfhood outside of the realm of unconsidered and conditioned responses.

McGann also offers a suggestive metaphor for the reader response aspects of hypertext through what he calls "quantum poetics" and the interpretative theories that he associates with it. In his online essay "Visible and Invisible Books," McGann suggests

that the text is a "transcendental object" that can never be known in its entirety because the reader's perception always modifies the object, much as an observer's gaze always changes the position of a quantum particle. McGann embraces this aspect of texts, which he sees as true of all written documents but regards as especially visible in hypertext, and he suggests that interpretative "deformation" should be the main goal of reading. As he explains,

> 'adequacy' in any critical representation cannot be measured by a scale of equivalence. A true critical representation does not accurately (so to speak) mirror its object, it consciously (so to speak) deforms its object. The critical act therefore involves no more (and no less) than a certain perspective on the object, its acuity of perception being a function of its selfconscious understanding of its own powers and limitations. ("Visible and Invisible Books")

McGann thus declares the impossibility and even undesirability of "objectivity" in literary criticism and instead calls for "self-conscious subjectivity" (Radiant Textuality 24) .

However, in order for a spirituality constituting self-awareness to be a viable aspect of heretical reading in hypertext, the self and its relationship to interpretative technologies like hypertext must be carefully defined. The danger of a hypertextual method of reading that focuses on self is that it could potentially become a tool for systematically misrepresenting all literature as a mirror of the critic's own subject position. If all texts consist of interpretative choices in the manner of a "Choose Your Own Adventure" book, then teachers and students might be tempted to make only

choices that conform to their own aesthetic, spiritual, and political subject positions without regard for the plausible intentions of the author or the evidence of the text. The best answer to this danger comes from distinguishing between the self and the subject position, and allowing for points of generative overlap between the two.

Erik Davis' chapter, "Techgnosis, American Style," offers insights into how Harold Bloom's American Gnostic version of the self might apply to information technologies such as cyberspace. Davis argues that the "technolibertarian" impulses of hackers and designers of cyberspace derive from the same version of the Gnostic self that Bloom identifies as the core of the "American religion" (102-103, 108-17). Bloom articulates this idea eloquently and repeatedly throughout The American Religion, as when he declares that "the American Religion, for its two centuries of existence, seems to me irretrievably Gnostic. It is a knowing, by and of an uncreated self, or self-within-the-self, and the knowledge leads to freedom" (49). Bloom also twice summarizes his position in an aphorism about self-awareness: "*Awareness*, centered on the self, is *faith* for an American" (25, 54). He thus consistently follows his distinction between Christian faith and *gnosis*, which he equates with awareness: "It does not believe or trust, it *knows*, though it wants always to know yet more" (31). For Bloom, this knowledge is not primarily consciousness of one's everyday identity and the ways that it has been constructed by society, but rather the awareness of an inner "spark" or fragment of God within (54). By speaking of an "uncreated" and "free" inner self, Bloom is implicitly distinguishing between the self and the "subject position" of one's habitual state of consciousness (including but not limited to one's race, gender, and class position). He

also implicitly acknowledges that some aspects of the identity are overdetermined, though he rarely states this overtly except in his Gnostic reading of Gravity's Rainbow (2). Nevertheless, both his definition of the self of the American Religion and his Gnostic reading of Gravity's Rainbow suggest that even in the most overdetermined linguistic or societal structures, the awareness of the sparks of a free self is still possible.

No technology can uncover these sparks of self-awareness immediately or without effort, yet the encounter with literature through hypertext can encourage students to think about their responses to what they read and how these responses relate to their selves. As Pagels twice suggests, *gnosis* is associated with a sense of "interior direction" and "an inner capacity to find one's own direction," and it is precisely this navigational sense that directs a reader through the forking paths of a hypertext (120, 123). When Michael Joyce introduces his hyperfiction Afternoon, a Story, he encourages the reader to search for hidden links with the advice "click on words that interest or invite you." Hypertext prompts the reader to consider who the "you" in this statement is and why it is invited by certain words, images, and ideas in a text, especially when another reader or group of readers has overlooked or condemned these ideas. The enabling of self-examination by hypertext is not an invitation to complacent narcissism, since the disorienting form of postmodern fiction coupled with the winding paths of hypertext prevent any steady reliance upon an unconsidered subject position. Rather, hypertext prompts the reader to examine the free aspects of her selfhood and to confront the ways in which her subject position has been constructed and controlled by archontic hegemonies that create conditioned responses to given interpretative junctures. These ideological discourses and

their perpetrators are much like Pointsman, the Pavlovian in Gravity's Rainbow who attempts to engineer predetermined responses to the forkings or "points" of psychological railroad tracks.

The constraints on choice produced by overdetermining structures have led some deconstructionists to argue that decisions must be made by "the other," since the intentional subject is always the product of system and structure. For a decision to be possible, an overdetermining system must have temporarily broken down, and the subject position produced by it must also have momentarily collapsed or dissolved. Thus, Derrida writes in his "Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism," "every time I decide, if a decision is possible, I invent the who, and I decide who decides what; at this moment the question is not the who or the what but rather that of the decision, if there is such a thing" (84). In Derrida's system, the presence of an intentional subject automatically nullifies the possibility of a decision, which can only occur through a spontaneous and unsystematic "invention" of the "I" and the situation to be decided. Despite the complexities of this philosophical dilemma, Derrida acknowledges that in many legal and ethical situations a decision must be made promptly, and therefore it is made by an "other" whose traces exist within the subject. As Derrida explains, "one must say that in the relationship to the other, who is indeed the one in the name of which and of whom the decision is taken, the other remains inappropriable to the process of identification" (84). The phrase "inappropriable to the process of identification" indicates Derrida's rejection of the possibility that an intentional subject can ever make a choice, as when he states that "the transcendental subject is that which renders the

decision impossible" (84). Derrida thus paradoxically suggests that a metaphysically stable subjectivity actually prevents free decisions because such a subject would have to have originated in an overdetermining system that eliminates choice.

While Derrida's argumentation holds together if one accepts his premises, two of his assumptions about decisions are unproven and ideological assertions rather than argued conclusions. The utter dismissal of the possibility of a free intentional subject and his use of the term "other" rather than "self" are assumptions derived from an ideological dismissal of Romantic individuality. Derrida claims to have deconstructed the barrier between internal subjectivity and the external ethical requirements of the "other," so that the trace of the other is neither interior nor exterior to the subject but rather an "interior alterity." However, if this claim is true, then the trace of the other could just as well be referred to as the true self, which is other from socially constructed identity markers yet known through the awareness of one's innermost selfhood. Bloom's version of Gnostic selfhood, which he derives in part from the Romanticist individualism and Transcendentalist self-reliance that deconstructionists reject, celebrates the awareness of this innermost self as *gnosis*. When stripped of its ideological biases, the Derridaean concept of the decision as made by an "other" intersects with the Bloomian concept of the self as a fragment of an "alien" or separate God in the notion of an "inner alterity."[lxviii] Derrida offers a corrective to Bloom's potentially solipsistic disregard of others, while Bloom prevents Derrida's argument from jettisoning the self without justification. If the two theories are combined in hypertext pedagogy, they allow

for possibilities of "free" selfhood that have not been traditionally valorized in poststructuralist approaches to teaching with computers.

Hypertext pedagogy can foster the search for a free self because individual readers will respond to different passages or lexia as the key links out of their particular interpretative dilemmas. Hypertext necessitates an encounter with disorienting and potentially immobilizing structures, as Aarseth suggests in his analysis of the hypertext *aporia*. However, to write an interpretative essay, the reader must find a way out of this *aporia* through the liberating knowledge of presence and transcendence. Because the intimations of transcendent presence occur in fragmentary "lexia" or sparks scattered through a network, the knowledge of them will be different from reader to reader. After confronting disorientation and strangeness, the student must make a choice, and this choice is based upon a reaction to the text that is deeply "individual" in the sense of "unique" and "idiosyncratic," if not "monolithic" or "predictably stable." A non-totalizing self can respond to intimations of non-totalizing presence and transcendence, and the response of this self is ultimately free. This self is non-totalizing because it is not the everyday identity of the student, but only a part of this identity as it responds to a particular interpretative challenge in a specific classroom assignment using hypertext.

However, the reaction of the self to the text is only free to the extent that it engages with the otherness of a complex and disorienting literary work written by an author with a set of intentions that may be quite foreign to the student's everyday habits of perception. In this respect, the freedom as self-awareness sought by heretical reading differs from Bloom's version of the Gnostic freedom of self, which he describes as "a dangerous and

doom-eager freedom: from nature, time, history, community, other selves" (49). Hypertext networks cannot provide the self an escape into a *pleroma* of utter peace and aesthetic solitude, even though Davis suggests that this is often the ambition of some techgnostic members of cyberspace (115-17). Rather, hypertext can allow readers to experience the momentary intrusion of transcendent presence as the *gnosis* of selfhood. Readers experience these moments as deeply inner at the same time that they are responses to sparks scattered through a radically "other" text created by an author whose difference from the reader should be respected. A student of literature necessarily finds himself within a network of "time, history, community, and other selves," yet the path he takes through this network is based upon an individual and idiosyncratic self.

Hypertext and Navigational Choice

Because heretical reading enables navigational choice motivated by the interior direction of an inner self, it is ideally suited for teaching the writing of interpretative hypertext essays. Heresy is a more precise model for hypertext pedagogy than Bloom's theory of interpretation as agon, which leads to totalizing, hegemonic, and "archontic" interpretations rather than freedom. To impose a meaning upon the text solely for the purpose of overturning a previous position or of proving other possible interpretations wrong is an act of totalizing aggression and useless non-conformity for their own sake. Insisting that one's heretical interpretation is the only valid one quickly turns heresy into orthodoxy, just as the archons always believe themselves to be servants of the true God. Bloom's own use of Gnostic symbolism to develop an "antithetical" reading method in Kabbalah and Criticism falls into this trap, leading him to declare that all agonistic

ephebes become archontic demiurges even while condemning the tyrannical qualities of their precursors (63-64). The fault of purely agonistic reading is that it encourages readers to make totalizing interpretative claims about their own personal positions. Agon also invites one-on-one battles between critics (or authors) for the sake of dominating the previous party with one's rhetorical strength rather than refining the merits of one's own position. Agonistic reading is either a variety of modified de Manian deconstruction involving the use of rhetorical tropes to overpower a previous argument, or a "negative" deconstruction involving the flipping of binaries so as to privilege the traditionally subordinate side. Both of these agonistic methods unwittingly reinforce restrictive systems even while they attempt to contest or reverse them, and these hierarchies are incompatible with the structure of hypertext.

McGann briefly identifies the hypertextual method of interpretative "deformation" with "heretical" strategies of reading scripture, but he also mistakenly associates hypertext with agonistic misreading by referencing Bloom's "revisionary ratios" as examples of interpretative deformation (Radiant Textuality 115, 113-14). He provocatively conceptualizes interpretation primarily as a game, but his brief consideration of this game's religious ramifications demonstrates the dangers of conceptualizing hypertext agonistically. In a meta-critical moment structured in imitation of Blake's Marriage of Heaven and Hell, McGann writes:

> VOICE OF AN ANGEL. But this is implicitly to propose that the works of our cultural inheritance have no meaning or identity an sich--that their meanings are whatever we choose to make of them. It is to make a mere game of the acts of

imagination.

VOICE OF THE DEVIL. Are we then to make a business or religion of those acts? If a business then we propose to make something of our inheritance and not simply bury it in the ground, lest it be lost. If a religion we propose to recreate the world anew exactly as did the demiurge of the Book of Genesis when he refashioned his pagan inheritance by pretending there were no strange gods before him, and then making a rule forbidding any later ones as well. (Radiant Textuality 160)

While McGann's vision of quantum poetics is insightful and compelling, his suggestion that interpreters should become tyrannical demiurges who deny the validity of interpretations before and after them is disturbing, even though he means it primarily as the tongue-in-cheek response of a "devil's advocate."

Conceiving of choice navigationally allows students to construct hypertext essays that contest previous interpretative positions without falling into the trap of archontic, agonistic reading. This navigational choice is not merely the freedom to wander in an exploratory hypertext, but rather the freedom to develop an argument which comprises one route through an interpretative network. In other words, the last step of heretical reading involves a shift from what Michael Joyce terms "exploratory" to "constructive" hypertext. As Joyce explains, "By constructive use, I mean to describe a much less familiar use of hypertext as an invention or analytic tool, such as the uses we have designed for and made of Storyspace" (42). Instead of a system in which student readers follow links or add them to an existing web, they would learn web design skills with the purpose of writing hypertext essays.[lxix] The goals of these essays would be to

learn to be "heretical" in a metaphorical sense involving the contestation of previous restrictive interpretative orthodoxies.

For an undergraduate paper, such as the ones assigned in my own sophomore-level "Literary Contests and Contexts" class, the assignments would be a synthesis of web page and essay. They would require length in order to develop and would therefore be best suited for a final paper, though the same principles might eventually be applied on a smaller scale to short papers. The assignment would ask the student to select a topic that they find interesting in relationship to their chosen text, as well as critical articles on that topic. They would then be prompted to look for ways in which they disagree with the previous interpretations of this topic and to offer alternate interpretations, with each possible reading represented as a web link in a menu of choices. The student would then also insert links that represented the steps in their argument, which might at times coincide with the branches representing the other arguments and would at other times fork from them. Only basic knowledge of a web editor like Dreamweaver would be required for the student to write these essays. Students could be taught to create simple web pages that would use structures like tables to organize the text of an essay, and they could then learn to link between the pages. Depending on the amount of class time available to work on hypertext authoring, the instructor could also teach skills such as basic html (hypertext markup language), a programming code that allows for more finely nuanced control over web design. In order to teach these compositional strategies, the instructor would present demonstration essays to model the structure of the assignment.

Constructive hypertext combined with heretical reading allows a student to take an interpretative position that challenges previous arguments on the basis of intimations of transcendent presence associated with an interpretative path. Hypertext helps students to visually represent the interpretative network of possible evidence within a text as well as the heretical path that they take. In practical terms, this means that the student should construct a map of their interpretation, probably in the form of a horizontal tree-diagram.[lxx] Such a map would consist of interpretative "nodes" and the lines of argument connecting them, with forkings and branchings between the various points forming a network. In terms of web design, each node would represent a page in a larger web site, while the forkings and branchings would occur through links leading from one page to another. Hypertext essays would begin by the student asserting a thesis, which would form the first lexia from which all the other branches would emerge. Several branches would then proceed out of this point, comprised of the analytical summaries of previous critical articles. These branches would occur through a page of links, each of which would lead to a discussion of previous interpretations of a literary text from the perspective of the student's topic.

The reader of the student's essay could explore each of these possible interpretations, which would then link to pages indicating the student's heretical divergence from previous critical articles. This is the key juncture of heretical reading: the location of "the singular point" that the previous interpretation "jumped the wrong way from," as Pynchon describes William Slothrop's heresy (556). This interpretative move resembles the first of Bloom's revisionary ratios that a poet makes from a precursor

poet in order to overcome the anxiety of influence, which he calls a "clinamen" or "swerve" (19-45). However, the interpretative forking of heretical reading in hypertext differs from Bloom's vision because it is not a "strong misreading" or swerve away from either the textual evidence or plausible intentions of the author. Heretical reading is not agonistic misprision, but rather the assertion and justification of the right to take an available path through the interpretative network. This path is viable because there is textual evidence to support it, as well as contextual evidence to assert that it exists within the realm of possible authorial intention. This interpretation is one available reading--one possible set of links within a system of coordinates composed of nodes--but it is heretical because these particular linkages have not been included in a previous set of interpretations. Heretical reading involves the contestation of existing interpretations through the following of a different set of forks and the making of a different set of linkages from the dominant interpretative order.

Like most literary essays, the body of a hypertext essay would be composed of items of evidence connected argumentatively in order to support a thesis. However, a hypertext essay would differ from a linear essay in that each piece of evidence would branch into several possible forks by which the item could be interpreted. This form is especially appropriate to an interpretative essay about an intricate postmodern text, in which there are many possible interpretations of any given piece of evidence, as well as myriad connections between this passage and other passages throughout the book. All interpretation is to some extent a matter of choices made by the reader from an array of possible options available from the evidence of the text and the possible intentions of the

author. This is especially the case in a postmodern novel, which often creates apparent interpretative indeterminacy through a proliferation of alternate choices that seem to cancel each other out. However, essays are ultimately written not through a passive, anti-hermeneutic abdication of interpretative choice, but through self-consciously taking a series of choices at various interpretative junctures. These junctures add up to produce an interpretative path that could be represented as a succession of highlighted line segments connecting the nodes in a network.[lxxi] The goal of a hypertext essay is to acknowledge the interpretative network while at the same time highlighting and justifying a particular path through it. A completed hypertext essay could be mapped through a tree diagram of forkings and branchings with a particular path color-coded to indicate the direction of the thesis. The application of heretical reading to hypertext pedagogy thus culminates in a specific assignment that develops out of my own method of reading but that can also be realistically completed within an undergraduate English course.[lxxii]

Heretical reading can be productively applied in hypertext pedagogy because the primary texts that provide the basis for this method of interpretation directly prefigure hypertext. Hypertext also illustrates in concrete form the procedures that I used to interpret my primary texts, which involved an affirmation of interpretative freedom as a question and a process. Hypertext pedagogy clarifies my own role in heretical reading by extending a set of liberatory ambitions beyond the representational and narrative worlds of my primary texts and into the realm of hermeneutic procedures. Just as these novels represent sparks of presence and transcendence within otherwise metaphysically empty universes, so particularly radiant lexia can convey intimations of transcendent presence.

Just as characters can pass through disorientation and aporia into a liberatory knowledge that frees them from archontic conspiracies and enables them to act positively, so interpreters can make assertive knowledge claims that free them from previous critical orthodoxies. Just as characters can experience a spirituality constituting self-awareness, so readers can gain an interpretative self-awareness of an inner spark that provides a sense of direction through hypertexts and proto-hypertexts. Just as these novels dramatize possibilities of heresy as the navigational choice to take forbidden paths on the basis of presence and transcendence, so heretical reading provides a way to construct and navigate a path through a hypertext essay.

[liv] In Of Two Minds: Hypertext Pedagogy and Poetics, Michael Joyce draws upon the pedagogical implications of the etymological roots of "technology" when he writes that "the classroom is a mirror of a practice and an expression of a *technē*, i.e. both a way to do things and an artful state of mind" (63).

[lv] For example, Joyce invokes "Choose Your Own Adventure" books as key examples of "proto-hypertexts," and he compares these narratives to Cortázar's Hopscotch (138).

[lvi] Nelson himself references Nabokov's Pale Fire, Sterne's Tristram Shandy, and Julio Cortázar's Hopscotch when defining hypertext (Dream Machines 29).

[lvii] Robert Coover offers one such catalog of proto-hypertextual fictions in his review of hyperfiction, "The End of Books," where he cites "Sterne, Joyce, Queneau, Cortázar, Calvino, and Pavić" as precursors of hypertext (119). "He Thinks the Way We Dream," Coover's review of The Dictionary of the Khazars, poetically celebrates the non-linear and choice-driven aspects of this work, and Joyce uses Pavić as a key example of proto-hypertextual fiction (Joyce 105-06).

[lviii] Erik Davis celebrates mystical and Gnostic elements in Lévy's work, while Mark Taylor denounces them as examples of a retrograde "cybergnosis" that unknowingly returns to a dualistic hatred of the body and matter (Davis 299-301, 330-31, Taylor 223).

[lix] Lévy's imagery closely parallels Dick's opposition of the "black iron prison" to its original form as a benevolently-designed "living maze," and both authors invoke Cretans as idealized maze-designers (VALIS 185-86, Lévy 252-55).

[lx] My class website modeling some of the skills involved in heretical reading and hypertext pedagogy can be viewed at http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/~howard/314lspring2005.

[lxi] Espen Aarseth's rhetorical typology of hypertext structures describes "linking" as the "master figure" of hypertext (91). At the same time, both Nelson and Joyce identify "branching" as the primary structure (Nelson 0/2, Joyce 155).

[lxii] For example, the introductory statement of the site reads, "Pynchon's style of writing is unique, electrifying, and complex. A potential map to self-awareness as well as an intricate puzzle-box, this postmodern Deadalus has paradoxically constructed his verbal mazes not to confound, but to reveal. Simply put, his iconoclastic prose is both gnostic in intention and delightful in execution. Like the labyrinthine chains of DNA coiled in the nucleus of life, it is often dense and convoluted in structure, but the encoded message is shimmering, elusive, and profound." Several themes of heretical reading are foreshadowed in this eloquent passage, though they are not developed at length on the site. The

introduction to the section on Pynchon's works also briefly touches upon the relationship between *gnosis* and paranoia when the editors write, "And where Gnosis provides the shafts of illumination, Paranoia dwells in the shadows." This site uses as section headers many of the quotations from Pynchon's work that are crucial to heretical reading, but the editors do not link them interpretatively or offer a path through them.

[lxiii] As Landow notes, one of Stuart Moulthrop's first hypertext works was Forking Paths: An Interaction After Jorge Luis Borges, a hypertextual adaptation of Borges' story (56). Aarseth also quotes "The Garden of the Forking Paths" in order to describe the labyrinthine structure of cybertexts, including cybertextual printed works (8).

[lxiv] Joyce also conceptualizes hypertext as a Derridaean "differential network," which Derrida defines as "a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces" (Joyce 161, Derrida cited in Joyce).

[lxv] One example of an anti-hermeneutic approach is Brian McHale's "Modernist Reading, Postmodernist Text," which reductively dismisses as "paranoid" and "modernist" all attempts at interpreting Gravity's Rainbow. McHale instead advocates the "meta-solution" of acknowledging all conflicting evidence so as to fully describe the indeterminacy of Pynchon's texts without ever choosing between possible interpretations (81-83).

[lxvi] For example, Jay Bolter argues in Writing Space that hypertext "reifies the metaphor of reader response, for the reader participates in the making of the text as a sequence of words" (158). Bolter observes that hypertext fulfills the model of interpretation advocated by reader response theorists such as Iser, who argues that a text is "an arena in which reader and author participate in a game of the imagination" (157). Bolter also sees hypertext as the enactment of Iser and Fish's concept of the "figurative text," whose structure is built by each reader's response. Yet, reader response is even more applicable in hypertext than in printed text, since "what was only figuratively true in the case of print, becomes literally true in the electronic medium" (158).

[lxvii] Moulthrop does not reference Gnosticism directly despite his coinage of "paragnosis," though his use of the root *gnosis* does indirectly relate to the Gnostic tradition via the postmodern critic Ihab Hassan and his concept of an "immanent" "gnostic (noo)sphere." Hassan uses this phrase in The Postmodern Turn, where he posits the emergence of a "New Gnosticism, or the Dematerialization of Existence—a movement toward abstraction, away from the sensory, bodily, concrete and a desire for pure consciousness" (64). The phrase that Moulthrop quotes on the "gnostic (noö)sphere" and "immanence" refers to Hassan's argument that the postmodern era exhibits "the growing capacity of mind to generate itself through symbols" (172). Hassan's lack of reference to the classical Gnostics leads him to mistakenly overlook the Gnostic quest for divine presence and transcendence, which he attempts to replace with a purely linguistic and symbolic "immanence." He defines immanence as "a term that I employ without religious echo to designate the capacity of mind to generalize itself in symbols, intervene more and more into nature, act upon itself through its own abstractions and so become, increasingly, im-mediately its own environment" (93). Unfortunately, Hassan's version of Gnosticism is a poststructuralist misunderstanding founded upon the mistaken assumption that the Gnostics sought to all existence into insubstantial linguistic intertextuality. This is the same tendency to falsely identify Gnosticism with negative deconstruction that mars much of the usage of Gnostic concepts in literary criticism.

[lxviii] This analogy may result from Benjamin and Bloom's study of the works of Gershom Scholem, a scholar of Jewish mysticism who argued that some branches of this tradition were Jewish versions of Gnosticism (Scholem Kabbalah 143). While Derrida was not a mystic and takes pains to suggest that the deconstructionist focus on difference should not be regarded as a form of "negative theology," faint mystical resonances in his later work may derive from his familiarity with Scholem's thought via Benjamin ("Différance" 388). Indeed, Derrida inadvertently corroborates the Gnostic theological aspects of Bloom's version of self in an interpretation of a letter by Benjamin that invokes God as "Wholly Other" to the world of law and calculation ("The Force of Law" 50, 57). This "Wholly Other" divinity resembles the situation of the Gnostic true God and self as "other" to the archontic world.

[lxix] David Barndollar, program coordinator of the Computer Writing and Research Laboratory at the University of Texas, Austin, has written a "Rationale for Teaching Hypertext Authoring" in sophomore level literature courses. Drawing on McGann's Radiant Textuality, Barndollar argues that the primary purpose for teaching web authoring should be to convey to students the awareness that all texts are "marked up" in the manner of a hypertext. Learning the actual "markup" of a hypertext page helps students to recognize all texts as composed of coded elements that must be recognized as "distinct" from each other and the rest of the text in order to bring about successful interpretation. Barndollar focuses on markup rather than interpretative choice, yet he compellingly argues that hypertext authoring can be usefully taught in a literature course in ways that facilitate interpretation.

[lxx] "Mind-mapping" software, such as NovaMind, could be used to construct such diagrams quickly and clearly, though boxes and lines drawn with pen and paper could also represent the structure of pages and links.

[lxxi] Aarseth notes that the branch of mathematics called "graph theory" can be used to analyze the "topological" structures of hypertext and cybertext (43).

[lxxii] The assignment sheet for the hypertext essay on *Pale Fire* that I gave my sophomore-level "Literary Contests and Contexts" class in Fall 2004 can be viewed at http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/~howard/314L/hypertextassignment.htm.

Chapter 4

Literary Pedagogy as Game Design: Interactive Fiction and the Rules of Heretical Reading

The first three chapters of the dissertation establish that the primary goal of heretical reading is freedom, modeled in postmodern texts and in hypertext rhetorical pedagogy as a question and a process. However, enacting these ambitions within a literature classroom presents another set of challenges requiring further theorization and practical explanations. Too much freedom produces anarchy within the classroom, resulting in chaotic, pointless discussion or awkward silence that suggests unclear pedagogical goals. In contrast to this ineffective tolerance of excessive freedom, heretical reading should encourage students to interact with the text in order to introduce the possibilities of freedom discussed in previous chapters, such as liberating knowledge and navigational choice. In other words, the convictions underlying heretical reading operate within the classroom as a set of rules, but these rules are designed to open up, not to constrain; to energetically orient, not to govern; to yield satisfactions at the expressive level, not to conclude. These rules function most effectively to encourage freedom rather than to restrict it when they are suggested aesthetically rather than declared didactically. Heretical reading operates within the classroom as a game, but this game has serious philosophical, ethical, and even potentially spiritual implications.

Most instructors believe on some level that their class activities encourage interaction with the text, though few have a rigorous way to theorize this interactivity. They must therefore fall back on the desirable but vague goal of "inventive" or "creative"

teaching solely on the basis of their own imaginations. Rather than re-inventing the wheel of interactivity, I argue in this chapter that there already exists a tradition for discussing and enacting interactivity in the type of computer game called interactive fiction (often abbreviated as "IF"). The theory of interactive fiction falls within a broader field of inquiry called game design, which refers to the techniques and principles by which programmers design computer and video games of all sorts, ranging from simple arcade games to intensively multimedia action games with three-dimensional animation. Literary pedagogy can be thought of as a form of game design, in which the teacher transforms a printed text into an interactive fiction by locating and devising "puzzles" in the form of interpretative challenges for the student to solve. By applying the principles of game design while teaching postmodern novels, instructors can draw upon the theories and examples of interactivity already associated with interactive fiction to enhance their own pedagogical imaginations.

Interactive fiction is a combination of narrative, computer game, and puzzle in which the computer tells a story, allowing readers to input "commands" that tell the main character how to behave and affect the course of the plot. D.G. Jerz, a professor of New Media studies, concisely defines interactive fiction on his Playing, Studying, and Writing Interactive Fictions web site:

> Interactive fiction (IF) is computer-mediated narrative, resembling a very finely-grained 'Choose Your Own Adventure' story. The interactor reads a short textual description ("You are standing at the end of a road before a small brick building."), and types instructions to the computer ("enter building"). The plot can

change based on what the interactor types. It has the potential to be more truly interactive than hypertext.

While "Choose Your Own Adventure" books allow the reader to shape the narrative by taking different paths through the text, Jerz's addition of "finely grained" suggests that interactive fiction increases the potential for reader participation by giving a greater range of possible options through input into the text. In "Toward a Theory of Interactive Fiction," Nick Montfort offers a similar, fourfold definition of interactive fiction that also emphasizes a combination of narrative and reader interactivity. Montfort describes interactive fiction as "a text-accepting, text-generating computer program; a potential narrative, that is, a system which produces narrative during interaction; a simulation of an environment or world; and a structure of rules within which an outcome is sought, also known as a game."

Interactive fiction began as a genre of text-based computer games written in the mid 1970's and throughout the 1980's, of which the first examples were Adventure and Zork. In the late 1980's, these games ceased to have commercial viability because of the development of more graphically focused games. Interactive fiction is no longer sold in computer game stores, but several independent programmers and artists have revived the form in the 1990's, developing the imaginative and artistic potential that was already present even in its most simplistic versions. A variety of highly creative artists have worked in the form, such as Robert Pinsky (former poet laureate of the United States) who wrote an interactive fiction called Mindwheel in 1984. This "electronic novel" draws allegorical imagery from Dante and includes puzzles based on Pinsky's own

poetry. Other self-consciously literary writers of interactive fiction include the Oxford mathematician Graham Nelson, who developed the computer programming language "Inform" to allow people to continue to write in the genre. Nelson's Curses and Jigsaw are regarded as classics in the genre, celebrated for their epic imaginative scope and poetic description. In addition to Nelson, the writer Andrew Plotkin has written works of elaborate metafictional and psychological complexity, including his surrealist fiction So Far.

Interactive fiction is an emerging area of New Media studies that is only recently beginning to be theorized and whose pedagogical potential has not yet been fully tapped. Montfort has recently written two foundational theoretical books and articles on the subject: Twisty Little Passages and "Toward a Theory of Interactive Fiction Theory." His book is primarily a narratological analysis and history of interactive fiction, but his theorization of the medium lends itself to pedagogical applications. One article by Brendan Desilets, "Interactive Fiction vs. the Pause That Distresses" briefly explores pedagogical uses of interactive fiction in teaching critical thinking skills and basic literary vocabulary to middle school students.[lxxiii] However, the relationship of interactive fiction to the complex pedagogical tasks associated with applying a method of reading to postmodern novels in the undergraduate classroom still remains to be explored.

Interactive fiction combines a newly defined theoretical territory with an interest in a commercially unpopular technology centered around the aesthetic experience of the written word. Much of New Media studies focuses on visual media, including the fast-paced, graphically-oriented video games that are commercially fashionable in 2005.[lxxiv]

In contrast, interactive fiction demands a careful and imaginative attention to the written word that encourages the patience and rigorous analytical skills required to read literature. In "Toward a Theory of Interactive Fiction," Montfort acknowledges that "text" can include graphical and auditory elements, yet he explains that he is "using *text* more specifically, to mean 'strings of words.'" For Montfort, "*interactive fiction* indicates a category of text-based works, works that can contain other media elements but where text and textual exchange are central." Thus, interactive fiction is well-suited to a reading method that positions itself as deliberately "heretical" and that seeks to engage students with books, which are themselves something of a commercially unpopular and outmoded entertainment medium in the eyes of many undergraduate students.

Interactive Fiction and Literary Pedagogy

Heretical reading seeks to transform novels into interactive fictions in order to encourage freedom in the form of interaction with the text. The use of interactive fiction can take place both in actual, computerized form and as a metaphorical resource for structuring class discussion. Interactive fiction can be taught alongside printed postmodern novels in order to introduce students to narratives that contain aesthetically engaging puzzles with serious intellectual implications. Portions of postmodern novels could also be adapted into computerized interactive fictions using Graham Nelson's programming language "Inform." Inform is a complicated programming language that would require considerable effort from a teacher in the humanities to learn, yet Roger Firth's Inform Beginner's Guide and the technical sections of Graham Nelson's Inform Designer's Manual make this a plausible pedagogical option.[lxxv] Interactivity could be

further increased through more recent gaming technologies, such as three-dimensional animation, used to create the heavily multimedia games commercially popular today. Though much contemporary gaming is mindless entertainment, some designers aim for high intellectual and aesthetic achievement in new forms, and the associated technologies can be adapted for pedagogical purposes.[lxxvi] However, the application of game design to literary pedagogy will be most effective if one clarifies the principles of teaching before becoming overly involved in the technologies themselves, many of which require vast expenditures of time from teams of designers to produce a finished product. After one rigorously states the principles derived from the theory and practice of interactive fiction, they can be applied through a variety of technologies in order to advance complex pedagogical goals in a way that is accessible to students.

In addition, since not all classrooms are computer-assisted and much of the instructor's purpose is to facilitate direct, human, and personal discussion with students, postmodern novels can be transformed into interactive fictions even in a classroom with minimal technology. By carefully planning one's daily classroom activities, the ongoing discussion of a postmodern novel can become a vast, intricate, and engaging game conducted verbally. In this scenario, the instructor, like the computerized narrator of an interactive fiction, elicits analyses and responses from students.[lxxvii] While it is difficult for a printed book to provide the possibilities of interaction that a computer program does, literary pedagogy can allow the student to interact with the text by performing a broad range of hermeneutic operations on it, each of which changes the text as it is imagined and experienced within the classroom. Printed books do not give readers the

opportunity to type commands into the text about what a character should do in a given situation, yet students may discuss characters' actions in different ways that alter their motivation, significance, and possibly their outcome (in the case of a novel with an indeterminate ending, such as The Crying of Lot 49). These interpretative operations enable the When Nelson describes the role of the narrator in an interactive fiction, his description closely resembles the instructor's ideal role within the classroom: "Like the player, but unlike every character in the game (including the protagonist), the narrator knows that it *is* a game: it's the narrator who announces the rules, awards points and offers clues" (Inform Designer's Manual 373). Postmodern fictions often present themselves as games, but their rules are not explicit, nor do they signal when hermeneutic obstacles have been passed by awarding points or offering a "reward" message. Solving interpretative challenges in such works can be intrinsically rewarding through the aesthetic pleasure or intellectual insight that they offer. However, inexperienced readers may be disoriented to the point that they do not spontaneously respond to these interpretative challenges or their artistic rewards. An experienced instructor can make these rules more explicit and can help students appreciate the aesthetic rewards of successfully analyzing an aspect of a text.

Rules that Energetically Orient

The first rule of interactive fiction pedagogy is that the landscape of the text is to be imagined as a geographic and conceptual space akin to a labyrinth through which students can move in the course of discussions.[lxxviii] This way of imagining the text is a key trait of interactive fiction, which creates a simulated world of "rooms" or discrete

locations, each with its associated set of objects and puzzles, through which the player can wander. When playing an interactive fiction, the player must often make a map, usually consisting of nodes on a network and the paths between them. Similarly, the author of an interactive fiction has to map these locations before programming and describing them, a skill which interactive fiction theorist and writer Emily Short describes in her "Laying Out Geography in IF" article. Interactive fiction often prominently features mazes and labyrinths, which are simultaneously locations in the simulated world and also navigational puzzles testing the player's ability to move through a disorienting space without becoming permanently lost. Many classic interactive fictions, such as Adventure and Zork, take place entirely within mazes or labyrinthine caves that mirror the winding pathways of their own verbal and computational construction.[lxxix] The title of Montfort's book, Twisty Little Passages, alludes to the description of the "Pirate's Maze" puzzle in the first interactive fiction Adventure as "a maze of twisty little passages, all alike." At the same time, the title is a pun that suggests the intricate verbal windings of literary "passages," in the sense of "quotations from a work of literature." The image of the labyrinth is also a key motif in postmodern fiction, which I have discussed in relation to liberating knowledge in the "disquieting structures" sections of chapter 1 and 2 and the corresponding sections in the hypertext chapter.

In the best written interactive fictions, the spatial configuration of the simulated world is not just a cognitive challenge, but an arrangement of worlds or "places" with their own aesthetic atmosphere, rules of interaction, and thematic implications. In Pinsky's Mindwheel, a quest to save the world from extinction requires the player to

move through spatial representations of the minds of four individuals from the far future: an androgynous countercultural rock star, a fascist general, a poet, and a pacifist scientist. Each realm comments upon an aspect of human culture, ranging from the Orwellian nightmare of totalitarianism to the subtle emotional nuances of love poetry, including one of Pinsky's own sonnets. Similarly, Plotkin's So Far consistently correlates the exploration of physical locations with psychological states, as suggested by its subtitle of "an interactive catharsis". Emily Short suggests that meaning is inherent within the spatial configuration of So Far when she writes, "To say that it relies on symbolic vocabulary is to understate the issue. Plotkin's symbolism is merged wholly with the landscape; it *is* the landscape. The pieces are polyvalent and connotative, any given thing suggesting an array of connections and meanings, not denoting a single concept in its purity." Three examples of these symbolic landscapes include a summer realm inside and around a theater where a mysterious dramatic performance foreshadows the book's themes of romantic betrayal and reconciliation; an autumnal world with closed gates and a forbidding dome, each of which emblematizes the protagonist's psychological dilemmas; and a spring-like world in which none of the characters talk, suggesting the difficulties of communication that the protagonist must overcome. Curses lacks this psychological subtlety but compensates through the sheer spatial complexity and imaginative vividness of its simulated world. The player moves through the nooks and crannies of a vast attic, in which exploration reveals an increasing number of hidden rooms, trap doors, secret passages, and staircases. She also travels between fantastic,

imaginative spaces, including ancient paintings and murals, Tarot cards, and an "unreal city" modeled after T.S. Eliot's Wasteland.

Mapping the labyrinthine geography of The Crying of Lot 49 reveals a similar variety of conceptual locations—each of them associated with a set of themes, modes of interpretation, and puzzles—that can be explored by students. While the opening of The Crying of Lot 49 and the accompanying discussion occur in Oedipa's native suburb of Kinneret-Among-the-Pines, the range of locations soon proliferates. The action of chapters two through five takes place across a varied but recurrent set of locations constituting a symbolic or allegorical universe. These locations, situated primarily within San Narciso, include The Echo Courts motel, the Scope bar, Fangoso Lagoons, the Tank Theater, the Yoyodyne Plant, Zapf's Used Bookstore, and Vesperhaven House. An instructor can transform The Crying of Lot 49 into an interactive fiction by treating these locations as geographical representations of conceptual spaces that can be moved between and mapped in the course of discussion. This immersion in literature as a spatial environment can be enacted with simple technologies like sketches on the blackboard or markerboard, but it can also be enriched through further tools specific to a computer-assisted classroom. Various graphing and mapping programs provide precise, flexible visual aids for representing complex networks of locations and pathways between them. Some of these programs are specific to interactive fiction, such as the applications available for download from the "mapping tools" section of the interactive fiction archive.[lxxx] Other mapping programs for general use include Microsoft Visio, Omnigraffle, and the educational "mind-mapping" tool Novamind. Even more

multimedia-intensive options are also available, such as MOO's or 3-dimensional animation engines. However, in heretical reading, these tools should produce environments for the cognitive and interpretative challenges associated with games rather than glorified "chat rooms" encouraging aimless interpersonal communication.

While Oedipa visits each location in the book sequentially and a specified number of times, classroom discussion could move imaginatively back and forth between these spaces, revisiting a location in order to clarify the themes and concepts introduced there. For example, Fangoso Lagoons is a spatial representation of the complex capitalist machinations of Pierce Inverarity's estate and a locus for "cognitive mapping" in the sense advocated by Jameson (20, 41-49). The Echo Courts motel spatially embodies the allusions to the Narcissus and Echo myth that runs throughout the novel. This location can be connected, via the image of the "slow whirlwind" blowing the nymph's dress, back to San Narciso and Oedipa's "religious instant," which was accompanied by intimations of words out of a whirlwind (16, 14). Nefastis' apartment physically instantiates the concept of entropy and the associated dilemma of sorting truth from lies that Oedipa undertakes in San Francisco, which is visually represented in the Maxwell's Demon machine (84-87). This theme can be accentuated even further by the moment in which Oedipa's shadowing of the WASTE postman after a night of wandering randomly in San Francisco brings her back to Nefastis' apartment, but the thematic connections are more likely to be appreciated by a student who has mapped the setting of the novel (106). Like the worlds of Curses and Mindwheel, the map of The Crying of Lot 49 can also contain conceptual locations that exist only in art or the character's imagination but

nonetheless constitute a feature of the novel's landscape. For example, the tower in Remedios Varo's painting becomes a persistent spatial metaphor for Oedipa's isolation and anxieties about solipsism. This location can be connected to the Echo Courts motel by Pynchon's observation that the "end of her encapsulation in her tower" might logically begin here (31). Having students map these locations is one way to energetically orient them in a fictional world that can initially seem amorphous and disorienting. This rule does not take away from the work's intricacy and suggestiveness, but instead allows students to visualize its complexity so that they can move freely through it.

At the same time, the visualization of the text as a labyrinth teaches students that genuine navigational freedom requires interpretative work, since connections between conceptual areas are often hidden in such a way that prolonged effort yields an unexpected opportunity for movement. Pinsky refers to such a hidden and resistant connection as a "secret passage," and he sees this structural feature of interactive fiction and the experience that it yields as central to the experience of literature and literary pedagogy. He argues that poetry and computer games "share a great human myth or trope, an image that could be called the secret passage: the discovery of large, manifold channels through a small, ordinary looking or all but invisible aperture" (3). He further explains:

> I believe that the poetics of Zork and its modern descendants tells us more about the literary potential of the computer than we could learn from any amount of ambitious literary theorizing. At the beginning of Zork, the player character faces a small, empty house on a barren plain: a visible territory that can be walked over

> by entering a handful of keyboard commands. But ah!—after looking under the carpet, and opening the trapdoor, and descending and entering the tunnel; *then* one sees the world of Zork unfold outward into an immense network of concentric chambers, looping passageways, branching and terraced corridors. The map of this voluminous (if monotonous) universe was itself gigantic. (3, 26)

Pinsky argues that this episode in Zork emblematizes the opening up of a small and seemingly insignificant detail into a "galaxy of vast, systematic possibility," which he argues is also a microcosm of the computer itself. While Pinsky's own experience as a poet leads him to suggest that this metaphor is more characteristic of poetry than prose, the pedagogical transformation of a postmodern novel into an interactive fiction can actually exponentially multiply these secret passages by showing the many hidden connections between lexia scattered throughout a vast book. The aim of having students "map" the worlds of postmodern fiction resembles Pinsky's trope, which I have enacted pedagogically in class while discussing the "secret passage" in Pale Fire.[lxxxi]

Transforming printed texts into interactive fictions opens the way for possibilities of navigational choice on the part of the reader that build upon yet surpass those of hypertext by emphasizing the interpretative challenges that must be solved to move freely through the text.[lxxxii] Hypertext works well as a tool for teaching students how to write about postmodern novels, but further technologies and models are required to engage students with reading the books themselves on a day to day basis within the classroom. My hypertext chapter describes how different readers take alternative interpretative paths between the "sparks" of particularly meaningful nodes or "lexia" comprising a text.

However, in interactive fiction pedagogy, the episodes surrounding these lexia are envisioned as conceptual locations with thematic associations and their own interpretative challenges that must be solved to progress further. This rule is necessary because students do not spontaneously discover the sparks that allow them to invent an essay unless they first have a sense of the problems and issues at stake in the text.

Hypertext allows writers to construct networks of linked, forking lexia that readers can then traverse in various orders determined by their choices, but interactive fiction allows the reader to shape the text more actively by entering input into a program that responds to the reader's commands. Jerz makes this distinction when he writes:

> This fluidity makes IF (potentially) more interactive than hypertext (which draws a disproportionate amount of attention in literary circles). Talented programmer/authors who are creative enough to **predict and account for a wide range of reader responses** to a given situation can manufacture—within a finite computer program—the illusion of almost infinite freedom. **Hypertext narrative** offers some degree of free interaction from the reader, who can choose *this* link instead of *that* one; yet the **chunks of text themselves remain static**. They may be reshuffled and recontextualized, but all of the text has already been grouped into small, stored, linear formats. (boldface in original)

Jerz thus celebrates the possibility of interactive fiction to be more dynamic, interactive, and potentially emancipatory than hypertext, while at the same time preserving a useful skepticism toward the "illusion" of "infinite freedom." An interactive fiction is a game with rules and a work of literature with a limited number of possible options designed in

order to create a narrative rather than chaos and meaninglessness. Even some of the most seemingly anti-emancipatory theorizations of interactive fiction actually work in favor of heretical reading by suggesting that freedom requires rigorous work rather than anarchic complacency. In "The Muse in the Machine: Or, the Poetics of Zork," Pinsky declares that in interactive fiction:

> the reader-user applies herself to see more. This is the opposite of cant about the 'freedom' readers have when dealing with interactive texts: it is the freedom of the detective trying to solve a crime, or the captive trying to escape, a kind of authorial tyranny compared with the welcoming, available pages of a book.

Pinsky intends these examples of freedom ironically, yet the detective's efforts to decipher clues and the prisoner's struggle to liberate herself are precisely the forms of freedom that heretical reading seeks to encourage in students. The difficulties of interactive fiction counter students' potentially complacent and passive assumption that they can attain interpretative freedom without effort. Free interpretation requires work motivated by a drive to read a text over and over again, to be patiently 'stuck' at apparent dead ends, and to look for unexpected connections. Like Pinsky, Espen Aarseth also questions the "emancipatory" potential of technologically-generated text in favor of what he calls their "ergodic" qualities, which refers to texts that require work on the part of the reader to create a path through the text (14). Aarseth's definition of the "ergodic" meshes with my definition of the navigational aspect of freedom as the choice to take a path through a text that has been blocked by previous hegemonies. Hence, in heretical reading the "ergodic" qualities of interactive fiction suggest a way to advance the pedagogical

ends of liberation, because encouraging students to work to locate a path is crucial to their search for freedom. In interactive fiction, the ergodic obstacles that must be confronted in order to progress further in the game are called "puzzles," and they serve a crucial function in making literary texts into interactive fictions.

Puzzles and Rules that Liberate through Effort

In interactive fiction, a puzzle refers to any problem which must be solved in order to progress further in the game. In The Inform Designer's Manual, Nelson explains, "Without puzzles, or problems, or mechanisms to allow the player to receive the text a little at a time—whichever phrase you prefer—there is no interaction. Inevitably, puzzles are obstacles" (382). Though Nelson does not elaborate on the theoretical implications of this practical advice, his definition does suggest that puzzle design motivates readers' "reception" or ability to process the text not just through passive skimming but through careful contemplation "a little at a time."[lxxxiii] In "Toward a Theory of Interactive Fiction," Montfort defines a puzzle as **"**a challenge in a work of IF that requires a non-obvious set of commands in order to be met. Non-obvious refers to a hypothetical, typical interactor encountering the work for the first time; puzzles do remain puzzles, in this formulation, after an interactor discovers how to solve them." In interactive fiction, puzzles often take the form of navigating mazes, unlocking secret doors, answering riddles, deciphering codes, and finding and using unfamiliar objects or "treasures."[lxxxiv]

The metaphor of the puzzle applies particularly well to postmodern novels, which often present themselves not just as narratives but as collections of games to be solved by

the reader Many of these challenges parallel those of the protagonist within the book (or are presented simultaneously to the reader and a character), so that the novels are meta-interpretative as well as meta-fictional. Like many interactive fictions of the "adventure game" variety, The Crying of Lot 49 takes the form of a quest in which Oedipa must collect cryptic clues and converse with eccentric characters who may bear information crucial to her unraveling of a mystery. In the article "Interactive Fiction," Anthony Niesz and Norman Holland corroborate the importance of this structure to interactive fiction when they write that:

> in general, the structure is the Quest. The reader-hero sets out along a series of roads or passageways or rooms (one has to sketch a map to have any success at all with these games). She meets various helpers or adversaries; encounters obstacles, aids, or treasures; and finds dead ends, or, more likely, that she has left something several stages back that she now needs. (115)

Oedipa's quest is more heavily self-referential, ironized, and convoluted than the pattern described by theorists of mythic archetypes such as Joseph Campbell and represented in many interactive adventure games. However, Niesz and Holland also note in their 1984 article that interactive narratives could feature metafictional, proliferating fictions—a structure which the article explicitly compares to Pynchon's work (121). Such potential was fulfilled in the 1990's by writers such as Plotkin, whose bleakly surreal and metafictional works complicate the quest structure in ways comparable to Pynchon. As Nelson notes, "decipherment" and "riddles" are both classic puzzles within interactive fiction, and the novel's recurrent hieroglyphic imagery as well as the possible allusion to

Oedipus in Oedipa's name suggest the importance of these elements in the novel (Inform Designer's Manual 392).

Like The Crying of Lot 49, Pale Fire provides an excellent basis for a pedagogical interactive fiction because of its wide variety of interrelated games with many different artistic, psychological, historical, philosophical, and metaphysical implications. In this novel, John Shade experiences a simultaneously metaphysical and meta-interpretative enlightenment in which he realizes that his world is being manipulated by a mysterious group of cosmic chess-players called "they" who are "playing a game of worlds" (62-63). On a metafictional level, "they" are the readers who play a hermeneutic game in which they "make ornaments of accidents and possibilities" by finding meaning in seeming indeterminacy and chaos (63). The integration of these puzzles into the narrative of Pale Fire, and the interpretative significance of their solutions, means that Pale Fire could be readily made into a sophisticated interactive fiction. As D. Barton Johnson notes in Worlds in Regression, Nabokov's fictions abound in games, but these games have thematic and potentially metaphysical implications. Johnson explains that:

> the game aspect of Nabokov should not be down played, for Nabokov's games, in addition to the sheer fun and delight that they introduce into his novels, have a 'serious' purpose. Nabokov's games are a prominent part of the intricate web of allusion, coincidence, and pattern that mark the presence of the other world in the novels. (3)

Hence, Johnson organizes each of his chapters according to one type of game as exemplified in separate novels, including anagrams, chess problems, mazes, and

cosmological riddles. Johnson does not draw upon technological metaphors or the model of an interactive fiction, which provides a way to describe how these games are integrated with one another in novels and how they can be taught to students. Just as John Shade imagines that the "game of worlds" is based on chess moves, so Pale Fire also features references to the chess problems whose composition Nabokov regarded as an art form, to the point that his poetry collection Poems and Problems is half made up of chess problems. Pale Fire prominently alludes to a chess problem of the "king-in-the corner waiter of the *solus rex* type" (from which Nabokov's incomplete precursor to Pale Fire—Solus Rex—takes its name) (119). Just as most early interactive fictions were "treasure hunts" whose goal was the collection of valuable or magical items, so Pale Fire challenges the reader to find the king's "crown jewels" based on clues in the commentary and index (306). This search for an elusive item parallels the hermeneutic quest for meaning in Pale Fire, often hidden in unexpected caches protected by deceptive tricks and traps. Other puzzles prominently displayed in the novel are the coded message in the haunted barn and the "word golf" played in the index. The first of these games potentially foreshadows Shade's death, while the second reinforces the gendered and emotional tensions and transformations between the poem and the commentary ("hate-love in three, lass-male in four, and live-dead in five" [262]).

Puzzles have cognitive and interpretative components, both of which are intertwined in the most sophisticated interactive fictions. The cognitive component refers to the processing of information, such as finding the object needed to pass an obstacle or unscrambling an anagram. The thematic component of a puzzle involves interpreting the

possible implied meanings of a given set of cognitive challenges. For example, several of the puzzles in So Far pertain to the theme of being "so close yet so far" alluded to in the title and the final sentences of the game. Early on in the game, the player confronts a massive wooden gate that must be opened through a complex process of oiling rusted parts, opening hatches, climbing ladders and pulling cables. This requires intense mechanical thinking and experimentation, and a mistake can potentially kill the player character or render the puzzle insoluble at multiple junctures. The ultimate solution to this puzzle involves creating a state of productive tension by causing one supporting pillar to move near another one without touching it, thereby pulling a cable with the exact degree of force needed to lift the gate. As one learns more about the player character's problematic love life, this physical solution has thematic implications about the difficulties of negotiating romantic relationships, which often involve striving for a balance between intimacy and excessive closeness. Plotkin subtly suggests this theme when he writes, "the pillar slows, approaching its mate to the east. [. . .] A final creak. Stillness. The west pillar hangs suspended, leaning towards the east pillar which stands still straight; nearly reaching it; not quite touching. The gate is open." The use of the word "mate" in describing one of the pillars that is "not quite touching" the other evokes this theme, which is further emphasized in the description of the open gate. Plotkin writes, "The pillar to the east still stands, but the western one tilts wildly over your head. It leans towards its partner as if it has a secret to impart. But bright sky slices thin between the two dark shapes." The description of the closeness of the pillar to its

"partner" and the secret that separates them with a thin slice of sky echoes the opening prologue about the secret betrayal separating the lovers Rito and Imita.

Plotkin's puzzles evoke these themes at multiple times in the game, and an understanding of these thematic undercurrents is necessary to interact with them successfully. As Montfort argues, "the workings of the IF world and the themes of So Far must be enacted [. . .] for the interactor to make progress" (210).[lxxxv] Short also suggests a close relationship between the physical aspects of the puzzles in So Far and the emotional and ethical choices that they suggest. In keeping with heretical reading's ultimate goal of choice, Emily Short suggests that So Far presents each action undertaken to solve a puzzle as a choice with emotional, personal, and ethical ramifications. She writes that in interactive fiction,

> important choices of a personal nature—not choices about how to fend off the alligator who is about to bite off your leg if you don't feed him the ham, but choices about ethics or emotion—have always to be cast in terms of physical actions. Jigsaw, Spider and Web, and Tapestry all come to mind as having moments where the player's moral choice is encapsulated in a physical action, the significance of which has been carefully developed and spelled out in advance. What So Far achieves that distinguishes itself even from these (which are themselves moments of high artistry in the genre) is not teaching the player how to regard a single action as representative of moral choice, but presenting the whole world in such a way that it seems redolent of such choices, tying the

physical environment intimately to the emotional one in ways that are sometimes visible only in retrospect.

Short expresses her praise of So Far's aesthetic achievement in terms that have subtle pedagogical resonances. The game does not only "teach the player" to note the choice suggested by one action, but it "presents" a world in a way that teaches the player to regard all aspects of the world as suggestive of such choices.

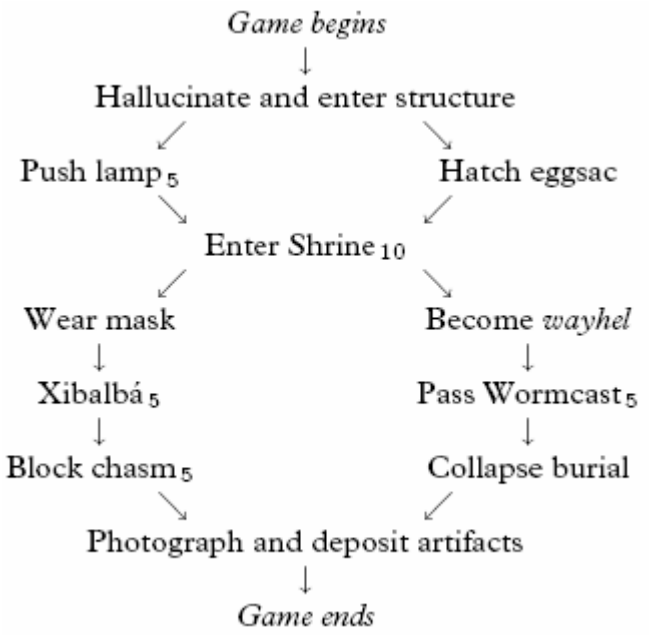
Transforming The Crying of Lot 49 into an interactive fiction involves encouraging students to enact the themes of the book by solving a network of discrete puzzles in such a way as to evoke maximum cognitive and interpretative interaction. For example, one of the book's key puzzles is deciphering the symbol on the bathroom wall of the Scope bar, which Pynchon reproduces in the book as a small sketch (38). The cognitive component of this puzzle entails visually identifying that this collection of circles and lines represents a muted posthorn and filling in the W.A.S.T.E. acronym as "We Await Silent Tristero's Empire." The thematic component involves understanding that the muted posthorn might suggest the silencing of the disenfranchised, the attempt of the marginalized to silence official channels of communication, or some combination of the two.

The interpretative aspect of a puzzle can be correctly solved in a variety of ways and in a variety of orders, but certain puzzles must be solved before others. The concepts, ideas, and themes introduced in one is required to interpret another one, just as an object from one area of an interactive fiction (such as a key) is needed to solve a puzzle in another area (such as unlocking a door). At each stage in reading, students

acquire new information that potentially enables them to comprehend a narrative element that they could not before, in much the same way that players of an interactive fiction accumulate an "inventory" of objects that allow them to solve puzzles in other areas of the game. In some cases, this collection of puzzle-solving objects is literal in that Oedipa actually does acquire or witness mysterious items that offer clues to interpretative dilemmas in other episodes of the book. For example, Fangoso Lagoons has a bronze marker with an inscription about a Wells Fargo group attacked by black riders who may or may not be connected to the Indian marauders in Mr. Thoth's dream at Vesperhaven, who also may or may not be extensions of the Tristero. Mr. Thoth's signet ring is inscribed with the same sign found on the Scope wall, and his name itself encodes the ancient Egyptian god who invented writing in the form of hieroglyphics. This ring, cut from the finger of a black-clad Indian, reinforces the violent revolutionary character of the Tristero as depicted on Genghis Cohen's stamps. In other words, the interactive fictions created by heretical reading are "object-oriented" in the sense denoted by the final two letters of the acronym "MOO," which indicates that objects within the simulated environment can be examined and manipulated.

By understanding the multiplicity of possible orders in which puzzles can be solved but the necessity of solving some before others, one can balance the need for careful and structured preparation with the aim of increasing possibilities for interpretative freedom as interaction. Nelson's concept of the "lattice diagram" as described in The Inform Designer's Manual can allow teachers to map out the order and placement of interpretative challenges in classroom discussion. Nelson uses this type of

diagram to integrate puzzles with narrative in order to create a maximally engrossing, smoothly flowing, and satisfying gaming experience. A lattice diagram depicts the possible orders in which puzzles can be solved and which puzzles must be solved before others. Nelson writes, "Towards the end of design it can be helpful to draw out a lattice diagram of the puzzles. At the top is a node representing the start of the game, and then lower nodes represent solved puzzles. An arrow is drawn between two puzzles if one has to be solved before the other can be" (380). His sample diagram for a simple game called "Ruins" is reproduced below (381).



Nelson's lattice diagrams and reflections on the structure of games suggest strategies for balancing freedom with structure in the classroom. He distinguishes between "narrow" games, in which each puzzle must be solved in a specified order before the next one can be started, and "broad" games, in which a wide variety of options are open to the player (380). He also warns that "wide games are dull, since no problem

solved will lead to any radical change. Narrow games are difficult to pitch: if the one puzzle open at a time is easy then play is too rapid, but if it is hard then the player will be abruptly slammed into a wall of frustration" (380). Since the primary goal of heretical reading is freedom, the posing of interpretative puzzles must be open-ended enough to allow for a broad range of student responses, a varied order of possible topics for discussion according to student interests, and the possibility of students raising their own topics of discussion that have not been envisioned by the teacher. The challenge is to produce an open-ended discussion that at the same time moves forward without degenerating into a flurry of random comments or tangents. Many instructors attempt to solve this problem through a list of discussion questions, basically in linear order and with an ideal answer but with occasional opportunities for spontaneous digressions. By Nelson's standards, this is a "narrow" game, and it does tend to frustrate students, since inability to find the correct answer to a question leaves the class stalled and unable to progress. Students often cease to think critically and imaginatively about possible interpretative choices and instead become preoccupied with second-guessing the instructor's desired response. The opposite strategy, which some instructors use in the name of producing "open" discussions, is to have a set of general questions or topics but minimal or no plans as to what a possible answer should be. By Nelson's standards, this is a "broad" game, which in actual practice can encourage students to speak volubly and randomly but often leaves them with a vague idea of the challenges of the text or what has been accomplished to solve them. Such an approach does not allow for much preparation on instructor's part except in their crafting of the initial questions, and there

is a fine line between the openness of this approach and an apparent or actual lack of preparation. In contrast to an excessively broad or narrow approach, the principles of game design allow the instructor to prepare not just a list of questions but a variety of detailed scenarios in response to various answers, each of which can be anticipated like the actions of a character in a game. The instructor can plan multiple possible orders and ways that each topic can lead into another topic or group of topics, depending upon the interpretative choices that students make through their answers and comments.

For example, students probably will not be able to understand why Oedipa mentally labels the symbol in the Scope bathroom as "hieroglyphics" until they have first comprehended the episode in which she attributes a "hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning" to the aerial view of San Narciso (14). They will not learn that the image on the scope wall may represent a muted posthorn until Genghis Cohen says so later in the book, but they may be able to apply Oedipa's thinking of the image as "hieroglyphics" in order to see that it is a symbol composed of basic lines and shapes that hold hidden significance. They will also likely be unable to decipher the "write by WASTE" label until Mike Fallopian tells Oedipa that it is an acronym, and this acronym is not revealed as "We Await Silent Tristero's Empire" until an encounter with Genghis Cohen late in the book (139). Only when each of these clues has been interpreted will they converge—just as the arrows in a lattice diagram converge—allowing for a variety of interpretative choices to be made about the subversive or numinous meanings of the posthorn as a symbol of the Tristero.

Surrealism, Mystery, and Rules that Open Rather than Coerce

Although many solutions to puzzles and possible orders for solving them are possible, the key convictions of heretical reading also generate rules about what constitutes acceptable solutions. Interpretative dilemmas should be solved in ways that encourage critique of oppressive social constructions of reality. Moreover, this critique should not take place for its own sake, but should rather be a means of revealing non-totalizing possibilities of presence and transcendence instead of utter indeterminacy. In interactive fiction, progressing requires correct puzzle solutions, which are rewarded through narrative advancement, points added to one's score, or access to another puzzle. Incorrect solutions result in lack of progress or an unpleasant narrative outcome, often including the player character's death. These strategies for rewarding skillful game play have their counterparts in the incentives traditionally used in classrooms, such as praising insightful answers or awarding high grades to excellent papers. At the same time, interactive fictions often draw upon subtler aesthetic strategies for motivating the player to proceed in certain ways rather than others. By observing and imitating these strategies, heretical reading can avoid coercion and instead encourage a search for presence and transcendence through an aesthetic atmosphere of surrealism and mystery. "Surrealism" in this context refers not just to the school of art founded by André Breton that flourished in the early half of the twentieth century, although this movement heavily influenced Pynchon and other postmodern authors.[lxxxvi] More generally, surrealism refers to an aesthetic of the fantastic, strange, and otherworldly, in which bizarre and dreamlike occurrences may signify not madness but the manifestation of a higher reality. This use of the word "surreal" returns to the historical etymology of the word, which was intended

to connote not the "unreal" or the "irreal" of popular usage but the "sur" or "super" real—the "higher than" or "more than" real. The aesthetic of surrealism is typical of interactive fictions and computer games in general, where the flexibility of a simulated computer world allows the structure of causality, the physical world, and probability to be radically altered. Some of these games use an aesthetic of surrealism to immerse the player in a world that operates according to vastly different rules from those of everyday reality but that nonetheless suggests opportunities for insight. There is an entire sub-genre of interactive fiction overtly referred to as the "surreal" genre on various online archives and lists of "canonical" interactive fictions works.[lxxxvii] Many aficionados of interactive fiction regard So Far as a "classic" work that creates a highly complex "surrealist" or "magic realist" aesthetic, a classification that Plotkin confirms when he describes the game's atmosphere as "pure surrealism."[lxxxviii] Similarly, Nelson describes Mindwheel as "a puckish dream-poem, Dante meets Alice Through the Looking-Glass" (Inform Designer's Manual 355). In addition to surrealism, "mystery" refers to a thrilling sense of hidden significance as well as secrecy, the unknown, and that which arouses curiosity through apparent obscurity. An aesthetic of mystery need not necessarily be surreal in any overtly fantastic sense, although the two qualities are often conjoined. The atmosphere of mystery is most directly associated with detective or "mystery" stories, and an instructor can draw upon both Pynchon's and Nabokov's appropriations of this genre and its structures. Mystery is also characteristic of interactive fictions, which often intensify the player's interest by evoking a sense of uncertainty as to the meaning of

events in the simulated world in order to prompt active investigation and the connection of clues.[lxxxix]

The aesthetic qualities of mystery and surrealism serve a crucial purpose in the classroom because many undergraduate students approach Oedipa Maas' experiences with a high degree of skepticism, which is increased by introducing them to even a small amount of postmodern theory. Students often come from suburban backgrounds similar to that of Oedipa and have difficulty understanding the sense of inauthenticity or confinement that she might experience in this position. Hence, pointing out that the Tristero are often associated with the disenfranchised does not immediately evoke sympathy for their revolutionary aims. Indeed, students may be either sufficiently hostile to or threatened by Pynchon's gestures toward critique and resistance that they immediately seek to explain these events away as hallucinations without basis in reality. Undergraduate students are also often resistant to the idea that there may be positive intimations of the numinous in the The Crying of Lot 49, because its bizarre world is foreign to their everyday experience of life, art, and religion. This is another reason that students tend to quickly dismiss Oedipa's experiences as delusions, which runs counter to the heretical ambitions of presence and transcendence. Students thus enclose themselves within the poststructuralist universe without knowing it, depriving themselves of the freedom to experience presence and transcendence not out of theoretical ambitions of radical critique but from antipathy to the very idea of critique.

Nelson's three part division of interactive fictions into "prologue," "middle game," and "end game" can provide a framework for gradually introducing an aesthetic

of surrealism and mystery to students who may be initially resistant to these aspects of postmodern novels (376). As Nelson explains, "The passage from the prologue to the middle game is often also the passage from the mundane to the fantastical, so that the prologue answers the question `How did I get into all this?'" (377). When Pynchon ominously writes that "things did not delay in turning curious," he signals precisely this transition between "the mundane and fantastical," which requires its own pedagogical maneuvers in order to involve students in the game (31). Having established Oedipa's situation as a suburban housewife with concerns about her mental health and a menacing sense of confinement and isolation, the instructor seeks to "sensitize" students to the clues about the Tristero in the same way that Oedipa becomes "sensitized" (32).

The use of an atmosphere of surrealism and mystery to encourage interaction and a search for meaning can be seen in the prologue and transition to middle game in So Far. The aesthetic strategies of this scene can be used to teach the thematically and structurally similar scene involving The Courier's Tragedy in The Crying of Lot 49. By juxtaposing scenes in Plotkin's game and Pynchon's novel, one can arrive at a way of more engagingly immersing students in concealed possibilities of presence and transcendence. Like the Courier's Tragedy episode, So Far opens in a theater, in which the "player character" (the identity that the player assumes when interacting with the fiction) is watching a strange play called Rito and Imita that seems charged with suggestions of mystery and what Pynchon calls "ritual reluctance" (55). The player character is thrown into this scene without explanation of its significance, but the detailed transcription of the play over the space of several "moves" in the game prompts the

player to pay close attention to its words. Each screen of So Far begins with a brief description of the surroundings which immerses the player both spatially and sensually in the world in order to prompt interaction as well as interpretation. The heading of the first screen establishes setting with the words "Lower Theater, on the bench" followed by "(hot, sticky)." The opening description also hints at aspects of the player character's mood and personal relationships, offering thematic clues as to his psychological state. Plotkin writes, "Damn the crowd, in truth: your mood was hot, foul, and dark when you sat down. Aessa was supposed to meet you here. She's made excuses before, and you don't think about what it might mean. Try not to think, rather. Just watch the story. One of your favorites." This description is both an instruction to the player to observe the play and subtle reverse psychology, encouraging him to think about the unexplained but seemingly rocky relationship between the player and Aessa. The play depicts an unfaithful woman whose lover battles with the man who seduced her, and whom she eventually slays with a spear. At one point, the narrator notes that the play's dark and rich Shakespearean dialogue has modulated into the form of a "ritual" invocation by the lover against the betrayer. While these events occur, the narrator also points out the elusive, half-glimpsed presence of the player-character's lover, Aessa—a shadowy figure who periodically flits by half-unseen throughout the game. Just as the clues in The Courier's Tragedy foreshadow many of the book's key themes and interpretative dilemmas, so the play in So Far sets the stage for the game's emotional tone and motivation.

While the tone and structure of this opening scene closely resembles The Courier's Tragedy episode, the most pedagogically useful similarity is the way that So Far draws the player into its surreal, disorienting narrative as an active participant rather than a passive spectator. Plotkin's strategies for provoking interaction (intimately bound up with the narrative and descriptive elements of the game) resemble the pedagogical promptings that can make one's teaching of a postmodern text by Pynchon more effective. While Oedipa willingly goes backstage to interrogate Driblette about the Tristero line, Plotkin cannot coerce the player but must instead drop hints that prompt the player into exploring the hidden recesses of the theater and the narrative elements that it contains. So Far physically instantiates these hints through a mysterious gust of cold air amid the hot, sticky weather that lures the player back into the theater after the play has ended to investigate crucial events and objects backstage. As the player emerges from the theater, he faces multiple choices of going south along a dusty road, north back into the theater, or west into the theater portico. However, Plotkin inserts hints to draw the player along in a certain way. If the player tries to go south, the narrator states "you hesitate at the curb. There was something back in the theater, something out of place." If the player goes south a second time, the game ends with the message "you go home" (along with depressing comments about the empty life that awaits the character when he returns). If the player goes west, further and stronger hinting ensues: "You feel the faintest cool breath of air. [. . .] Wait. Wait. What's ever cool in this suffocating summer heat? It comes again, slight, smoky, deep with autumn. Impossible." If you try to go

south again, the hinting becomes explicit. "You hesitate at the curb. That cool draft of air back in the theater—surely it deserves some investigation."

Like Plotkin's narrator in the interactive fiction, the instructor can amplify nuances of description and tone in The Courier's Tragedy in order to suggest non-coercively that the rules of this game involve keeping possibilities of presence and transcendence open. Students often initially express disorientation and aversion toward the convoluted and grotesque plot of this play, with its devious conspiracies and perverse, nihilistic villains. Yet, the play also contains numerous linkages to other themes and plot elements in the novel, including communication and entropy, the origin of the bones at the bottom of Lake Inverarity, and the first suggestions of the Tristero. As Edward Mendelson demonstrates in "The Sacred, the Profane, and The Crying of Lot 49," this play introduces much of the book's religious subtext, including Pentecostal imagery and suggestions of the miraculous. In order to prompt students to keep these possibilities open, an instructor can focus on the shift in tone toward thrilling mystery as the existence of the Tristero is intimated. The narrator explains, "It is at about this point in the play, in fact, that things get really peculiar, and a gentle chill, an ambiguity, begins to creep in among the words" (55). He explains that "a new mode of expression takes over. It can only be called a kind of ritual reluctance" (55). This "gentle chill" is the metaphorical equivalent of the cool breeze that Plotkin uses to prompt exploration of the backstage of the theater, and the instructor can use this tonal cue in a similar way to prompt students to consider where this feeling comes from and what it signifies. A tone of "ritual reluctance" is also deeply mysterious, suggesting that the Tristero can only be hinted at

rather than declaratively explained, like the secret truth at the heart of an ancient mystery play or the rite of a secret society. The Tristero, as Pynchon suggests several times in the novel, are associated with mystical possibilities of communication that exceed the verbal and operate through silence and indirection. When the protagonists of the play consider the Tristero, Pynchon writes, "as in Angelo's court, the curious chill creeps in. Everyone onstage (having clearly been directed to do so) becomes aware of a possibility" (56). By focusing on words like "possibility" and "curious chill," the instructor can suggest that the "ambiguity" of the Tristero is not meant to suggest a mere frustrating obscurity, but rather mystery. While this "chill" has its darker connotations in the ritualistic violence of the Tristero, it also implies the mysterious and the miraculous, as exhibited when the Tristero miraculously transform the Duke's false letter into a confession. The final lines of this play are the only time in which it explicitly uses the word Tristero, and this first appearance of the word in the novel embarks Oedipa on her quest. Pynchon writes, "Trystero. The word hung in the air as the act ended and all lights were for a moment cut; hung in the dark to puzzle Oedipa Maas, but not yet to exert the power over her it was to" (58). The word "puzzle" in these lines suggests the textual conundrums that Oedipa's attempts to gloss this line from the play will lead her to investigate—an investigation that she undertakes in response to the mystery of the play as a whole. Indeed, Pynchon observes that it is "the same aura of ritual reluctance" created by Driblette that draws her into further questioning him about the play's sources and meaning, even when his answers seem overtly anti-hermeneutic (62). A strategic attention to the verbal texture of these and similar passages can keep possibilities of

presence and transcendence open during the "end game" or final phases of discussion, in which each student begins to shape her own non-totalizing thesis about the novel's meaning.

End Game and Rules that Prevent Resolution

The discussion of chapter five in The Crying of Lot 49 corresponds to the transition between "middle game" and end game in Nelson's schema because it involves a "scavenger hunt" in which the various appearances of the posthorn must be collected in order to evaluate their significance. Nelson observes that "the passage from middle game to end game often takes the form of a scavenger hunt: throughout the middle game a number of well-hidden objects are collected and only when they are combined can the end game be entered" (379). By emphasizing Pynchon's own description of these post horns as "gemlike clues" or "symbols" found in "fragments of dreams," instructors can encourage students to experience this search as both an immersing game and a serious meditation on matters of doubt and revelation, isolation and communication (95). The initial presentation of these post horns should emphasize their association with the cryptic and the arcane in order to evoke the possibility of concealed meaning rather than an unconsidered hermeneutic of suspicion. Having also taught a class on detective stories, I find it helpful to encourage students to "play detective" as they collect these "clues," since this genre is overtly associated with a sense of hidden meaning in minutiae.[xc] Aspects of Pynchon's own language can be emphasized to suggest that he himself regards Oedipa's search for post horns in San Francisco as a mysterious game involving a quest to decipher hidden writing. The post horns may be hidden among "ideographs" on

an herbalist's sign and contained within "a complicated array of boxes, some with letters, some with numbers" that suggest "a kids' game" with spatial hints of "places on a map" and a conspiratorial "secret history" (95). Once this atmosphere has been established and the aim of the game becomes a search for intimations of meaning and truth, then a catalog of posthorns can be made that involves students in the multifarious ideas that they might suggest. This brings about the transition into the "end game" of the book, which introduces rules about confronting its conclusion and overarching themes.

The end game, or "master game" of an interactive fiction is the stage at which it presents its final challenges and, potentially, its greatest rewards. Nelson explains, "End games serve two purposes. First, they give the player a sense of being near to success (they used to be called the ``Master Game''), and can be used to culminate the plot, to reveal the game's secrets. They also serve to stop the final stage of the game from being too hard to play, narrowing it to only a few accessible rooms or objects" (379). In keeping with Nelson's comments, the entrance into the "end game" of The Crying of Lot 49 involves combining the collected objects from the "scavenger hunt," which are clues often figuratively represented as post horns, in order to develop an interpretation of the novel's meaning. Only when these clues have been gathered and considered can the student enter the "end game" of chapter 6. The "end game" of The Crying of Lot 49 takes place in a single closed auction room, in which Oedipa waits for the arrival of a mysterious bidder who may or may not be a representative of the Tristero. This ending does imply that Oedipa and the reader are near to the revelation of a secret, yet the book's indeterminate ending leaves this revelation trembling "just past the threshold" of

definitive resolution (24). In this respect, the "end game" of a classroom discussion differs from Nelson's theorization of this phase of interactive fictions, although it resembles more sophisticated interactive fictions as well as Montfort's theorization of these games. Nelson writes that "a mark of the last pieces of the puzzle falling into place is that loose ends are tied neatly up and the characters sent away with their fates worked out and futures settled. Looking back, from the point of view of a winning player, can you understand what has happened and why? Can you also see what is to happen to the protagonist next?" (380). None of these questions is definitively answered in the text of The Crying of Lot 49, challenging teachers to convince students that this lack of resolution is not frustrating but liberating because it invites them to make interpretative choices.

While the lack of a firm conclusion differs sharply from the neatly resolved endings of many early interactive fictions, Montfort notes that some IF works can be replayed over and over again after they have been initially "solved" because their mystery increases rather than decreases. He writes, "When the explicit mysteries of an interactive fiction are solved, a work that becomes more profoundly mysterious can be experienced again with interest even when the solution is known" (62). For example, the player's progress is registered in Mindwheel by a changing summary of the lessons that she learns about art and the values at the heart of civilization, instead of a "score" in the conventional form of numerical points. Similarly, to traverse the final two ethereal and abstract worlds of So Far and win the game, one must undo the resolution of the Rito and Imita play from the prologue by responding to one of its lines differently from the

character Rito. When a voice from out of a shape-shifting black ring utters the lines in which Imita asks Rito (now temporarily identified with the protagonist) to forgive her unconditionally for romantic betrayal, answering "yes" results in self and world-annihilating cataclysm. All the forms of productive tension that have been carefully maintained in the game's various symbolic puzzles collapse. Answering "no" returns the protagonist to the beginning world outside the theater, with an uncertain possibility of reconciliation with Aessa despite and perhaps because of the flaws of a relationship that is "so close yet so far" from perfection. This ending leaves the player free to interpret the psychological, metaphysical, or symbolic status of the game's strange voyage and to speculate on the character's future. As in these games, convincing students of the satisfactions of an unresolved ending involves establishing the "replay value" of a work of postmodern fiction through its potential for exponentially increasing mystery and insight. In confronting the final, overarching puzzles of the novel, such as "What is the Tristero?" or "What is the relationship between poem and commentary in Pale Fire?," the "outcome" of this game will ultimately be the generation of new text in the form of an interpretative essay. At this point, classroom discussion will shift into the territory described in chapter three, as students learn to invent and construct hypertextual or proto-hypertextual essays that represent an interpretative path through the text.

Transforming printed novels into interactive fictions gives students an aesthetic motivation for pursuing their own interpretative freedom by emphasizing the thrill of exploring the labyrinthine spaces and solving the puzzles of postmodern fiction. My own method of heretical reading remains committed to the analysis of postmodern authors'

appropriations of Gnosticism as well as the forms of liberating insight that can be gained from this analysis, which contests both the poststructuralist theorizations of the postmodern condition and the associated version of intellectual work. However, students will not be receptive to being sermonized about these possibilities of freedom. Rather, they can be drawn into them by the same aesthetic appeals that brought me to read postmodern fiction through the Gnostics in the first place: an aesthetic fascination with mysterious, surreal, and cryptic puzzles intimating hidden meaning. In an era of highly politicized interpretation, insisting upon an interpretative and pedagogical commitment to these forms of creativity and beauty is itself heretical. Heretical reading explores the mazes of postmodern fiction in search of an aesthetically motivated freedom that can be experienced and shared within the classroom.

[lxxiii] The table of contents of a forthcoming work, Interactive Fiction Theory, lists articles that analyze many aspects of the medium but none that explore its potential pedagogical applications. The web site containing this list is http://www.iftheory.com/index.html.

[lxxiv] For example, the New Media anthology First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game contains only one article on interactive fiction but several on graphics-intensive action games and first person shooters. However, many academic and popular studies of gaming continue to emphasize narrative, including Mark Meadows' Pause & Effect: The Art of Interactive Narrative, Chris Crawford on Interactive Storytelling, and Barry Glassner's Interactive Storytelling: Techniques for 21st Century Fiction.

[lxxv] Jerz notes that the difficulties of authoring interactive fictions stem from the absence of a "high-level" editor that would allow writers to bypass the mechanical complexities of a "low-level" language requiring substantial programming effort. He writes that

> hypertext authoring tools are now so widespread, and the World Wide Web so firmly entrenched in contemporary culture, that hypertext authorship has been thrown open to the masses, and at the same time thoroughly colonized by literary theorists. No such point-and-click authoring tools have, as yet, brought IF authorship to the masses; the IF author with any creative ambition must still invest considerable energy wrestling with the mundane technical details of programming, while simultaneously writing character dialogue and brief narrative passages that can be pieced together in multiple different ways.

[lxxvi] The University of Texas of Austin is making some of these resources available to instructors through a "Game Design Boot Camp" taught by Dr. Thom Gillespie, the director of Indiana State University's M.I.M.E. program for New Media and Interactive Storytelling.

[lxxvii] The instructor would thus function similarly to what Montfort calls an "extra-diagetic" voice, which is one level removed from the narrative and offers reward messages, hints, and prompts in response to reader input ("Toward a Theory").

[lxxviii] The metaphor of texts, especially postmodern texts, as labyrinths or mazes is commonly applied but rarely rigorously theorized in terms of pedagogy. As I discuss in chapter three, Aarseth strongly critiques the "spatiodynamic fallacy" by which critics indiscriminately apply the metaphor of the text as a "game," "world," or "labyrinth" to printed texts (3-4). He argues that these models can only be literally applied to cybertexts, of which the "adventure game" or interactive fiction is a key example. In response, I argue that while printed novels may not be interactive in themselves, literary pedagogy can transform them into interactive fictions.

[lxxix] Erik Davis' Techgnosis describes the relationship between the labyrinthine settings of early interactive fiction and the convoluted internal workings of its underlying programming and hardware (213).

[lxxx] These resources can be found at http://www.ifarchive.org/indexes/if-archiveXmapping-tools.html.

[lxxxi] While discussing the hypertextual structure of Pale Fire, I encourage the class to map the system of linkages between the lines of Shade's poem and Kinbote's commentary. I also point out Nabokov's metafictional representation of these linkages in the description of the underground palace of Zembla, which could easily serve as a description of the underground empire of Zork (126). As students map the labyrinthine interconnections between the lines of the poem and the commentary entries, they find that a comprehensible narrative about King Charles' escape from Zembla begins to cohere. Line 70 leads to note 70, which describes the King's escape with the aid of decoy kings and branches off into two "passages": note 149 and note 171. Note 149 narrates the king's escape through a "secret corridor" that leads from the closet in his bedroom underneath the palace, along with a flashback of him discovering this passage as child. Line 171 describes Gradus' pursuit of the king. Returning to the poem, one eventually arrives at line 80 and its accompanying note, describing the king's bedroom, which connects to note 130. Note 130 gives the description of the underground labyrinth and the secret passage, followed by the enigmatic aside "(See the interesting note to line 149)." If one maps these interconnections, treating them as locations in a labyrinth, the link from note 130 to note 149 instantiates the very secret passage that is described at length in note 149.

When my students were involved in the process of mapping this labyrinth, some of them reacted with surprise and delight at the discovery of Nabokov's carefully structured, metafictional play. Yet, the notion of a secret connection is more than a structural ornament, since it returns with thematic suggestiveness when Kinbote hides the newly-acquired draft of Pale Fire in a closet after taking the envelope from the body of John Shade. Kinbote writes that he exited the closet "as if it had been the end of the secret passage that had taken me all the way out of my enchanted castle and right from Zembla to *this* Arcady" (295). True to Pinsky's celebration of the secret passage as a metaphor for the discovery of hidden literary meaning, Kinbote's description resonates with implications about the hidden connections between commentary and poem, fantasy and reality, the mirror-world of Zembla and the grimness of Kinbote's exile of Russia.

[lxxxii] In addition, interactive fiction has not been co-opted by poststructuralist literary theory in the way that hypertext has, allowing heretical reading to express its positive agenda without having to engage in a constant critique of poststructuralist limitations. Jerz explains the as-yet-untheorized status of interactive fiction in comparison with hypertext when he writes:

> Literary hypertext has received far more academic attention than IF, perhaps because the initial canon of literary (pre-HTML) hypertexts was established easily, via Landow's Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology (1992), which presented the work of authors and critics who seemed to find, in hypertext, the perfect illustration of certain pre-existing literary theories (although see §2.1: Pinsky). Those scholars who consider IF as something more than an amusement often cast it as a form of postmodern narrative; yet unlike hypertext, IF does not neatly embody any pre-existing literary theories (although see §1.1: Hutcheon).

Interactive fiction offers a powerful tool for teaching postmodern fiction because scholars "often cast it as a form of postmodern narrative," yet it does not easily fit poststructuralist theorizations of language and literature. Theorists of interactive fiction like Jerz head off this maneuver pre-emptively, leaving the territory open for other theories to flourish there. This does not mean that interactive fiction embodies

heretical reading perfectly or that my goal is to claim exclusive rights to its pedagogical use. Instead, interactive fiction can provide a pedagogical environment in which heretical reading can operate effectively.

[lxxxiii] Desilets argues that interactive fiction serves a similar role by allowing readers and teachers to "pause" at pedagogically useful points in the text without breaking the aesthetic flow of reading. Desilets primarily sees the pauses as useful for encouraging "reading comprehension," such as looking up the definition of a word. While Desilets argues that the puzzles in interactive fictions encourage students to think about how they conceptualize problems, he does not correlate interpretative challenges with puzzles. This is the case because he is for the most part discussing simple interactive adventures and "young adult" novels rather than postmodern metafictions and their IF counterparts.

[lxxxiv] Jerz and Nelson offer systematic and complete catalogs of various types of puzzles (Nelson 382-394, Jerz "Puzzles in Interactive Fiction").

[lxxxv] Plotkin acknowledges in an interview that the connecting threads between narrative elements and puzzles in So Far are thematic rather than chronological or causal ("IF Roundtable").

[lxxxvi] Pynchon describes his interest in surrealism and his literary use of its aesthetic effects in the introduction to Slow Learner (20).

[lxxxvii] For example, Short's "Recommended Playing" list, includes a section devoted to the "surreal" genre http://emshort.home.mindspring.com/literacy.htm#Surreal. "Baf's Guide to the Interactive Fiction Archive" also contains a large section of "surreal" games, listed at http://www.wurb.com/if/genre/16. The site's author corroborates my own definition of the surreal when he comments: "Bizarre worlds, unreliable perceptions, and distorted realities. (No, it's not a definition of Surrealism that Andre Breton would approve of, but it's a distinct attitude found in games that use text to escape the plausible or imaginable.)"

[lxxxviii] Emily Short's review of So Far discusses the work's "classic" status and its surrealist aesthetic, while Montfort's sub-chapter on Plotkin praises the author's literary abilities and mentions the common classification of So Far as "surrealist" or "magic realist" (Short "A Step," Montfort Twisty Little Passages 210).

[lxxxix] The two qualities of surrealism and mystery were conjoined in Myst, one of the most popular early graphical adventure games that grew out of the interactive fiction tradition. Myst thrust the player into a deserted, starkly lonely landscape with strange buildings, objects, and machines whose uncertain significance encouraged intense exploration. The game's title is a punning combination of "mist" and "mystery," suggesting its designers' awareness that this aesthetic effect is central to their work.

[xc] G.K. Chesterton poetically celebrates this aesthetic effect in "A Defence of Detective Stories," where he writes that in a detective story "the lights of the city begin to glow like innumerable goblin eyes, since they are the guardians of some secret, however crude, which the writer knows and the reader does not. Every twist of the road is like a finger pointing to it; every fantastic skyline of chimney-pots seems wildly and derisively signaling the meaning of the mystery" (4). Chesterton also associates the "minutiae of Sherlock Holmes" with "the romance of detail in civilization," which results from the possibility of hidden meaning in man-made urban landscapes. Like Pynchon, Chesterton uses hieroglyphic imagery to evoke this coded significance: "Every brick has as human a hieroglyph as if it were a graven brick of Babylon" (5).

Works Cited

Aarseth, Espen. Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997.

Alexandrov, Vladimir. Nabokov's Otherworld. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991.

Barndollar, David. "A Rationale for Teaching Hypertext Authoring in Literature Courses." <http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/research/whitepapers/2003/030822-2.pdf>

Baudrillard, Jean. Simulacra and Simulation. Trans. Sheila Faria Glaser. 1984. Michigan: Michigan UP, 1994.

Behrens, Richard, and Allen B. Ruch. "Philip K. Dick." The Modern Word. Ed. Allen B. Ruch. 20 Mar. 2004. <http://www.themodernword.com/scriptorium/dick.html>

Bloom, Harold. Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism. New York: Oxford UP, 1982.

---. "A Reading." The Gospel of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus. Trans. Marvin Meyer. New York: HarperCollins, 1992.

---. The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992.

---. The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry. 1973. New York: Oxford UP, 1997.

---. The Flight to Lucifer: A Gnostic Fantasy. New York: Farrar, 1979.

---. "Introduction." Modern Critical Views: Thomas Pynchon. New York: Chelsea House, 1986. 1-9.

---. Kabbalah and Criticism. New York: Seabury Press, 1975.

Bernstein, Mark. “The Navigation Problem Reconsidered.” Hypertext/Hypermedia Handbook. Emily Berk and Joseph Devlin, eds.. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991. 285-97.

Bolter, Jay David. Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext and the History of Writing. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1991.

Borges, Jorge Luis. “A Defense of Basilides the False.” Selected Non-Fictions: Jorge Luis Borges. Trans. Esther Allen et al. Ed. Eliot Weinberger. New York: Viking, 1999. 65-68.

Burroughs, William S. Naked Lunch. 1959. New York: Grove, 1990.

Caputo, John D. The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997.

Chesterton, G.K. “A Defence of Detective Stories.” The Art of the Mystery Story: A Collection of Critical Essays. Biblo and Tannen: New York, 1974.

Coover, Robert. “He Thinks the Way We Dream.” New York Times Book Review. November 20, 1988: 15.

---. “The End of Books.” New York Times Book Review. August 29, 1993: 1, 8-10.

Culiano, Ioan. The Tree of Gnosis: Gnostic Mythology from Early Christianity to Modern Nihilism. Trans. H.S. Wiesner and Ioan Culiano. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992.

Davis, Erik. Techgnosis: Myth, Magic, and Mysticism in the Age of Information. New York: Harmony, 1998.

Davydov, Sergej. "Teksty-Matreški" Vladimira Nabokova. München: Verlag Otto Sagner, 1982.

De Man, Paul. Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust. New Haven: Yale UP, 1979.

Derrida, Jacques. "Différance." Margins of Philosophy. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982.

---. "Force of Law." Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice. Ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michael Rosenfeld, and David Carlson. New York: Routledge, 1992.

---. "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials." Derrida and Negative Theology. Ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay. Albany: State University of New York, 1992.

---. Of Grammatology. 1967. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976.

---. "Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism." Deconstruction and Pragmatism. Ed. Chantal Mouffe. London: Routledge, 1996.

Desilets, Brendan. "Interactive Fiction vs. the Pause That Distresses: How Computer-Based Literature Interrupts the Reading Process Without Stopping the Fun." Currents in Electronic Literacy 1 (Spring 1999). 14 May 2005 http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/currents/spr99/desilets.html.

Dick, Philip K. VALIS. 1981. New York: Vintage, 1991.

---. The Divine Invasion. 1981. New York: Vintage, 1991.

---. “How To Build a Universe That Doesn’t Fall Apart Two Days Later.” The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick: Selected Literary and Philosophical Writings. Ed. Lawrence Sutin. New York: Pantheon, 1995. 259-80.

---. “If You Find This World Bad, You Should See Some of the Others.” The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick: Selected Literary and Philosophical Writings. Ed. Lawrence Sutin. New York: Pantheon, 1995. 233-58.

---. In Pursuit of VALIS: Excerpts from the Exegesis. Ed. Lawrence Sutin. Novato: Underwood-Miller, 1991.

---. A Scanner Darkly. Doubleday: Garden City, 1977.

---. The Transmigration of Timothy Archer. 1982. New York: Vintage, 1991.

DiTommaso, Lorenzo. “Gnosticism and Dualism in the Early Fiction of Philip K. Dick.” Science Fiction Studies 28 (2001): 49-65.

---. “Redemption in Philip K. Dick’s The Man in the High Castle.” Science Fiction Studies 26 (1999): 91-119.

Earl, James W. “Freedom and Knowledge in the Zone.” Approaches to Gravity’s Rainbow. Ed. Charles Clerc. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1983. 229-50.

Eddins, Dwight. The Gnostic Pynchon. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990.

Eliade, Mircea. 1957. The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion. Trans. Willard R. Trask. New York: Harper & Row, 1961.

Firth, Roger and Sonja Kesserich. Inform Beginner’s Guide. Ed. Dennis J. Jerz. 3rd ed. 2004. 5 July 2005 http:// http://www.inform-fiction.org/manual/download_ibg.html

Galbreath, Robert. "Salvation-Knowledge: Ironic Gnosticism in Valis and The Flight to Lucifer." The Science Fiction Dialogues. Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1982.

Grossmith, Robert. "Spiralizing the Circle: The Gnostic Subtext in Nabokov's Invitation to a Beheading." Essays in Poetics 12 (1987): 51-74.

Hassan, Ihab. The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1987.

Heidegger, Martin. Being and Time. 1926. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.

Hertzberg, Hendrik and David C.K. McClelland. "Paranoia." The Norton Reader: An Anthology of Expository Prose. Ed. Eastman, Arthur M., et al. 4th ed. New York: Norton, 1977. 172-81.

Hesse, Herman. The Glass Bead Game (Magister Ludi). 1943. Ed. Theodore Ziolkowski. New York: Henry Holt, 1990.

Hilfer, Tony. The New Hegemony in Literary Studies: Contradictions in Theory. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2003.

Hohmann, Charles. Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*: A Study of Its Conceptual Structure and of Rilke's Influence. New York: Peter Lang, 1986.

Hume, Kathryn. Pynchon's Mythography: An Approach to Gravity's Rainbow. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1987.

Jerz, D.G. "An Annotated Bibliography of Interactive Fiction Scholarship." Playing, Studying and Writing Interactive Fiction (Text Adventure Games). 14 May 2005 <http://jerz.setonhill.edu/if/>

---. Playing, Studying and Writing Interactive Fiction (Text Adventure Games). 14 May 2005 <http://jerz.setonhill.edu/if/>

---. "Puzzles in Interactive Fiction." Playing, Studying and Writing Interactive Fiction (Text Adventure Games). 17 May 2005. <http://jerz.setonhill.edu/if/Puzzles.htm>

Johnson, D. Barton. Worlds in Regression: Some Novels of Vladimir Nabokov. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1985.

Johnston, John. Information Multiplicity: American Fiction in the Age of Media Saturation. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1998.

Jonas, Hans. The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.

Joyce, Michael. Afternoon, a Story. 1987. CD-ROM. Watertown: Eastgate, 2001.

---. Of Two Minds: Hypertext Pedagogy and Poetics. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1995.

King, Karen L. What is Gnosticism?. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2003.

Landow, George P. Hypertext 2.0. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1997.

Latour, Bruno. We Have Never Been Modern. Trans. Catherine Porter. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993.

Layton, Bentley. The Gnostic Scriptures: Ancient Wisdom for the New Age. 1987. New York: Doubleday, 1995.

Lévy, Pierre. Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace. Trans. Robert Bononno. New York: Plenum Trade, 1997.

Mackey, Douglas. Philip K. Dick. Boston: Twayne, 1988.

---. "Science Fiction and Gnosticism." The Missouri Review 7 (1984): 112-20.

Mackey, Louis. "Gravity's Rainbow and the Economy of Preterition." The Meritorious Price of Our Redemption. William Pynchon. Ed. Michael W. Vella, Lance Schacterle, and Louis Mackey. New York: Peter Lang, 1992. xix-xli.

McClure, Jonathan. "Postmodern/Post-secular: Contemporary Fiction and Spirituality." Modern Fiction Studies 41 (1995): 141-63.

McGann, Jerome. Radiant Textuality: Literature After the World Wide Web. New York: Palgrave, 2001.

---. "Visible and Invisible Books: Hermetic Images in N-Dimensional Space." 25 November 2004. http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/~jjm2f/nlh2000web.html

McGowan, John. Postmodernism and Its Critics. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991.

McHale, Brian. Postmodernist Fiction. New York: Methuen, 1987.

Melley, Timothy. Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America. New York: Cornell UP, 2000.

Mendelson, Edward. "Gravity's Encylopedia." Mindful Pleasures: Essays on Thomas Pynchon. Ed. George Levine and David Leverenz. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976. 161-92.

---."The Sacred, the Profane, and The Crying of Lot 49." Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays. Ed. Edward Mendelson. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978.

Mirapaul, Matthew. "Hypertext Fiction on the Web: Unbound From Convention." New York Times on the Web. 26 June 1997. http://www.nytimes.com/library/cyber/mirapaul/062697mirapaul.html

Montfort, Nick. "Toward a Theory of Interactive Fiction." 19 Dec. 2003. First published 8 January 2002. To appear in IF Theory, ed. Emily Short. St. Charles, Illinois: The Interactive Fiction Library. 2004. 14 May 2005. <http://nickm.com/if/toward.html>.

---. Twisty Little Passages: An Approach to Interactive Fiction. MIT P: Cambridge, 2003.

Moulthrop, Stuart. "You Say You Want a Revolution?: Hypertext and the Laws of Media." Postmodern Culture 1 (1991). 25 November 2004. <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern_culture/v001/1.3moulthrop.html>

Moynahan, Julian. "A Russian Preface for Nabokov's Beheading." Novel 1 (1967): 12-18.

Nabokov, Vladimir. Bend Sinister. 1947. New York: Vintage, 1990.

---. Invitation to a Beheading. 1938. New York: Vintage, 1989.

---. Pale Fire. 1962. New York: Vintage, 1989.

---. Strong Opinions. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. The Birth to Presence. Trans. Brian Holmes et al. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993.

Nelson, Graham. Curses: An Interactive Diversion. Release 16. 1995. http://www.ifarchive.org/if-archive/

---. The Inform Designer's Manual. Fourth expanded edition May 2001: Release 4/2 (July 2001). The Interactive Fiction Library (IFLibrary.Org): St. Charles, Illinois, 2001.

Niesz, Anthony J. and Norman N. Holland**. "**Interactive Fiction." Critical Inquiry 11 (1984): 110-29.

Oxford English Dictionary Online. 2nd Ed. March 2004. Oxford UP. 19 March 2004. http://80-dictionary.oed.com.content.lib.utexas.edu:2048/entrance.dtl?ROLES=0STA0EMA&DOMAIN=.utexas.edu

Nelson, Theodor Holm. Computer Lib/Dream Machines. Redmond, Washington: Microsoft, 1987.

---. Literary Machines. South Bend, Indiana: Distributors, 1987.

Pagels, Elaine. Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas. New York: Random House, 2003.

---. The Gnostic Gospels. New York: Vintage, 1979.

Pavić, Milorad. The Dictionary of the Khazars. Trans. Christina Pribićević-Zorić.

Pinsky, Robert. "The Muse in the Machine: Or, The Poetics of Zork." New York Times March 19 1995: BR3+.

Plotkin, Andrew. "IF Roundtable: The Art of the Puzzle." XYZZY News 14. 15 May 2005. <ftp://ftp.gmd.de/if-archive/magazines/XYZZYnews/XYZZY14.PDF>

---. So Far: An Interactive Catharsis. Version 6. 1996. http://www.ifarchive.org/if-archive/

Pynchon, Thomas. 1966. The Crying of Lot 49. New York: Harper & Row, 1990.

---. Gravity's Rainbow. New York: Penguin, 1973.

---. "Is It O.K. To Be a Luddite?" New York Times Book Review. 28 Oct. 1984: 1, 40-41.

---. Letter. New York Times Book Review. 12 Mar. 1989: 29.

---. Slow Learner: Early Stories. 1984. Little, Brown, and Company: Boston, 1998.

Robinson, James M., Ed.. 1978. The Nag Hammadi Library. New York: Harper & Row, 1988.

Ruch, Allen B., Ed. The Modern Word. 1995. 26 November 2004. http://www.themodernword.com

Ruch, Allen B. and Larry Daw, Eds. "Thomas Pynchon: Spermatikos Logos." The Modern Word. 1995. 26 November 2004. http://www.themodernword.com/pynchon/index.html

Short, Emily. "Laying Out Geography in IF." 14 May 2005. <http://emshort.home.mindspring.com/Geography.html>

---. "A Step" (Review of So Far). 14 May 2005. http://www.ministryofpeace.com/if-review/reviews/20010622.html

Smith, Richard. "Preface." The Nag Hammadi Library. New York: Harper & Row, 1988. ix-xii.

---. "The Modern Relevance of Gnosticism." The Nag Hammadi Library. New York: Harper & Row, 1988. 532-49.

Stephenson, Gregory. "The Gnostic Vision of William S. Burroughs." The Review of Contemporary Fiction 4(1984): 40-49.

Sutin, Lawrence. Divine Invasions: A Life of Philip K. Dick. New York: Harmony Books, 1989.

---. "Introduction." The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick. New York: Pantheon, 1995. ix-xxvii.

Tanner, Tony. City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

Toker, Leona. Nabokov: The Mystery of Literary Structures. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989.

Van Biema, David. "The Lost Gospels." Time 22 Dec. 2003: 54-61.

Wardrip-Fruin, Noah and Pat Harrigan, eds. First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game. Cambridge: MIT P, 2004.

Warrick, Patricia S. Mind in Motion: The Fiction of Philip K. Dick. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1987.

Weisenburger, Steven. A *Gravity's Rainbow* Companion: Sources and Contexts for Pynchon's Novel. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1988.

Whitman, Walt. Leaves of Grass. 1855. American Poetry: The Nineteenth Century. Ed. John Hollander. Vol. 1. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1993.

Wiener, Norbert. The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society. 1950. New York: Doubleday, 1954.

Williams, Michael A. Re-Thinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996.

Vita

Jeffrey Lamar Howard was born in Fayetteville, Arkansas, on July 14, 1978, the son of Lamar and Melissa Howard. After completing his work at Rogers High School, Rogers, Arkansas, in 1996, he entered the University of Tulsa. He received the degree of Bachelor of Arts from the University of Tulsa in May 2000. In September 2000, he entered the Graduate School at the University of Texas. He received the degree of Master of Arts from the University of Texas in May 2002.

Permanent address: 2314 Wickersham Lane, Apt. 714, Austin, TX 78741

This dissertation was typed by the author.